

Protecting Your Back-to-School Immune System

By Dr. Theresa Tsingis, D.C., M.S.



For adults and children alike, the change of season and return to school results in exposure to all sorts of microbes. Most of us know that we should eat healthy antioxidant-type foods in order to optimize health, but how can personalized nutrition help families to withstand the onslaught of back-to-school bugs? Let's address one way that adults can keep themselves healthy, and then how to supply children with good back-to-school nutrition.

Adults can improve their chances of fighting viruses and bacteria by paying attention to their individual body composition. Why? Muscle acts as a reservoir for the immune system, providing amino acids for the production of infection-fighting cells. So when someone is carrying excess abdominal fat and inadequate muscle mass, they can become hosts for infection. Therefore, it is vitally important during the cold and flu season to target the loss of abdominal fat and avoid muscle loss, especially for people over 30. It's wise to find out your accurate body composition beforehand, in order to know how to improve your health during the upcoming season.

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Like adults, children have similar needs for antioxidant-rich nutrition; the challenge can be getting those foods into them. What are some ways to accomplish this? I've found, as a nutritionist and mother, that variety is key. Periodic shopping visits to pick up new snacks together does not have to be an ordeal. If you plan once every couple of months to take fully-fed children (don't forget to eat also) on a shopping trip, you will be able to collaborate, which leads to better compliance.

Many parents find that choosing a regular shopping day helps them organize snacks for the week. Encourage children to taste seasonal fruits and vegetables. The most antioxidant-rich foods are those with dark pigments (cranberries, pomegranates, grapes, berries, sweet potatoes). Try watching the Food Network together once in a while. Some youngsters take to "Iron Chef" and other contest-based shows, and creative eating habits may result!

I stock the pantry with a wide variety of non-perishable snacks for those on-the-run mornings. Many tasty fruit, nut and energy bars have low sugar and high fiber content. Nut butters and low-fat dairy products such as string cheese and yogurt are easily packable and have a long shelf life. If your child is sensitive to dairy, try soy-based products. Avoid nitrate- and chemical-laden snack packs, anything with high fructose corn syrup and partially hydrogenated fats. These additives have been linked to lowered school performance, diabetes and altered blood fat levels.

A sound nutrition approach maintains a steady blood sugar. This results in a constant supply of energy, which helps the immune system resist infection. To find out specific ways to boost your immunity, consult with a nutritionist. Accurate body composition analysis and a specific plan (not diet) based on your lifestyle and needs could be the best flu and cold prevention for this season.



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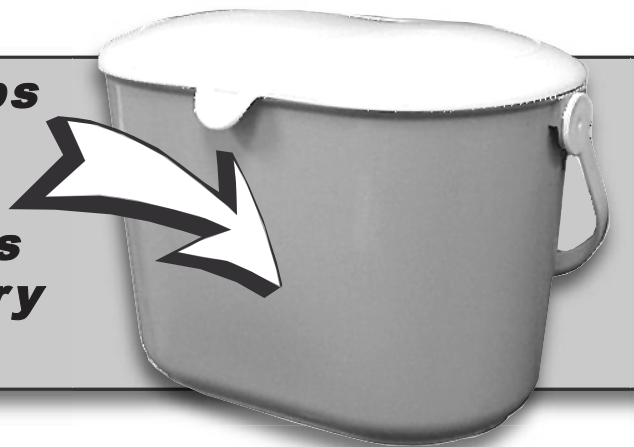
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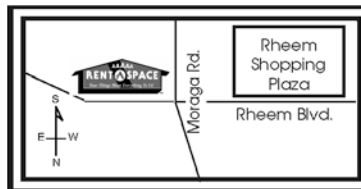
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