

## Staying healthy during flu season



Liam opened his lunchbox and cried with joy! In there, he had found all the sugary snacks and gooey fake fruit he's grown to love. Sitting next to him Sophie opened her own lunchbox and happily found a thermos of chicken and rice soup (her favourite!), some whole grain crackers, a few carrots, some raisins and a container of milk. Now, guess which child has the better odds at staying healthy during flu season?

“Healthy lunches help ensure healthy kids,” says Dr. Rachel Colley, a Research Scientist with the Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (HALO) at the CHEO Research Institute. “Your child’s immune system needs all the help it can to stay healthy and fight off germs, and good, healthy food goes a long way towards achieving that.”

One place to start is by replacing sugary drinks such as fruit cocktails and pop with 100% fruit juice, milk, soy milk or good old water. “That’s an easy switch that children won’t notice too much but it will have a positive effect on their bodies,” adds Dr. Colley. “Another idea is to increase the fibre content in your child’s lunch by replacing white bread with whole wheat pita, bread or wraps.”

Dr. Colley adds that you should try to aim for at least one serving of vegetables (such as cucumbers, carrot sticks, celery, peas in a pod, broccoli or cauliflower) and one serving of fruit (such as an apple or unsweetened apple sauce, banana, melon, grapes, dried cranberries or apricots) in each lunchbox. A serving size of fruits is a medium sized apple or banana and for vegetables, aim for 125 mL (or 1/2 cup) – the size of a hockey puck. And if you add some protein, in the form of a piece of chicken, some hummus, tuna, a little ham or a hard-boiled egg, then you are doing everything you can to help your child’s mind and body perform as they should.

Another way to help your child stay healthy is to make sure that he or she gets moving! “Studies show that regular, moderate exercise does wonder to boost the immune system,” says Dr. Colley. “Try to aim for 90 minutes of physical activity per day.”

But it doesn't have to be 90 consecutive minutes of soccer or hockey. Activities such as walking to school, playing at the park, kicking a ball around or even just dancing get your heart pumping and all add up.

“And another very important part to rev up your immunity against viruses or germs is sleep,” adds Dr. Colley. “Make sure that your child gets all the ZZZZZ’s he or she needs, since our bodies need to sleep to stay healthy and fight sickness.”

For a child between the ages of one to three, that would mean somewhere around ten to thirteen hours of sleep (naps and night time). For pre-schoolers, it's around ten to twelve hours. School age kids will need nine or ten hours of sleep and teens require at least eight hours, but sometimes up to nine or ten.

“In the end,” said Dr. Colley, “remember that Sophie’s lunch is a balanced meal, and provides her with a lot of the nutrients and vitamins her body needs. Liam will likely get hungry shortly after his meal because he has nothing to truly sustain him. And too much sugar and fat will actually work against his immune system.”

So, if you feed your kids healthy meals, encourage them to aim for at least 90 minutes of physical activity per day, and ensure that they get a good night's sleep, you will help their little bodies strengthen their immune system and help keep them healthy and strong during flu season.

- For more information on healthy lunch ideas, visit: [www.eatRightOntario.ca](http://www.eatRightOntario.ca) and [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca) and look for the “Cool lunches that kids will eat” factsheet.
- For more information on raising active kids, visit: <http://www.activehealthykids.ca/> and <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/>
- For more information on HALO, visit [www.cheori.org/HALO/](http://www.cheori.org/HALO/)
- For more information about children's sleep requirements, visit: [www.sleepforkids.org/html/tp.html](http://www.sleepforkids.org/html/tp.html)

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