# **How to boost immunity for growing kids, especially during the pandemic**

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Two years back, nobody could have imagined that anything like a pandemic could occur and that our worlds would turn upside down. [COVID-19](https://indianexpress.com/about/coronavirus/) has had an all-encompassing effect on our lives. Most of us are facing challenges; not only related to dealing with COVID but, financial challenges, lack of food/shelter/ employment/ social interactions, etc. It is not easy dealing with something that has crept into every decision of our lives – be it education, to food, to holidays or even weddings. The second wave has impacted us even more since there is almost no one who has not lost a close friend or a loved one. With multiple variants in the country, we should look after each other. We must keep our immunity high so that, god forbid, one contracts the virus- the body has the power to fight off the virus.

### **Which immunity boosters are recommended?**

Increasing immunity is the new obsession. To keep our immunity high, health specialists have recommended different types of immunity boosters for children and adults alike. Some of the immunity boosters that are suggested are:

* Vitamin C
* Vitamin D
* Vitamin A
* Vitamin E
* Zinc Supplements
* Omega 3 fatty acids

### **Are immunity boosters helpful?**

When the pandemic hit the world, and India in particular, the search for immunity boosters spiked by a huge percentage. Everyone was looking for ways to increase their health. They turned towards synthetic supplements like the pills listed above. A huge population of India felt like everyone in their home needed and increased immunity instantly and what better than supplements. Indians demanded immunity-boosting products /supplements, the pharmaceuticals, and the brands provided. Many products were re-branded as immunity boosters while some were being launched. Many products portrayed that it had supplements added in it which could really help one improve their immunity. The markets and the online stock were filled with immunity-boosting milk /supplements, protein shakes, etc. which assured increased protection against the deadly virus. Supplements and products have been selling like hotcakes.

However, the real question is whether immunity boosters are beneficial or is all this just a hoax? The WHO (World Health Organization) denies the fact that vitamin supplements help people fight against COVID-19.

Let us discuss Zinc supplements. The majority population in India is in some way persuaded that taking Zinc supplements daily will guarantee a boost in their immunity. But do you really know how these Zinc tablets affect your child growing up? These pills can have a drastic impact on the health of a growing-up child. Consuming too many zinc pills can:

* Harm the nervous system
* Cause anaemia
* Result in copper deficiency

Some cases also show that the use of Zinc nasal sprays can damage the sense of smell. Taking zinc pills more than required can heighten the chances of developing prostate [cancer](https://indianexpress.com/about/cancer/).

Another pill that the adults feel is good for their children is Vitamin C, whereas intake of all these vitamin supplements can be harmful to a child who is growing up. Giving too many pills for a long period of time to a child can:

* Impact the functioning of their organs
* Cause premature arthritis
* Cause mouth ulcers
* Cause muscle pain

### **What can parents substitute for supplements?**

A growing child does not need too many pills and supplements to help increase his/her immunity to fight off viruses. What the child really needs is:

* A balanced diet
* Home-cooked meal
* Increased exercise (aerobics, jogging, cycling, or yoga may help)
* A minimum of 8 hours of sleep
* Increased intake of water
* Take all safety precautions
* Keep the room/house effectively ventilated
* Have a schedule for the child
* Get your child vaccinated as soon as it is available and advised by the health specialists

To replace the supplements like Zinc and Vitamins, feed them foods that are high in vitamins/proteins/zinc, etc. Some foods rich in zinc are nuts, beans, bananas, oysters, whole grains, dairy foods like cheese, and many more. Food rich in vitamin C is- grapefruit, oranges, broccoli, potatoes, peppers, and many more. When a child needs supplements his or her doctor will themselves advise them to take the supplements and that too in a restricted manner.