

I love this article. This was written awhile back, yet it's so relevant today!

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/15-best-foods-when-sick#section16>

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on June 17, 2016**

**These are the 15 best foods to eat when sick.**

Hippocrates famously said, "*Let food be thy medicine, and medicine be thy food.*"

It's true that food can do much more than provide energy.

And when you're sick, eating the right foods is more important than ever.

Certain foods have powerful properties that can support your body while it's fighting an illness.

They may relieve certain symptoms and even help you heal more quickly.

## 1. CHICKEN SOUP

Chicken soup has been recommended as a remedy for the common cold for hundreds of years — and for good reason ([1Trusted Source](#)).

It's an easy-to-eat source of vitamins, minerals, calories and [protein](#), which are nutrients your body needs in larger quantities while you're sick ([2Trusted Source](#)).

Chicken soup is also an excellent source of fluids and electrolytes, both of which are necessary for hydration if you're making frequent trips to the bathroom.

Your body will also need even more fluids if you have a fever ([3Trusted Source](#)).

What's more, one study found chicken soup to be more effective at clearing nasal mucus than any other liquid studied. This means it's a natural decongestant, perhaps in part because it gives off hot steam ([4Trusted Source](#)).

Another reason for this effect is that chicken contains the amino acid cysteine. N-acetyl-cysteine, a form of cysteine, breaks apart mucus and has anti-viral, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects ([5Trusted Source](#), [6Trusted Source](#)).

Chicken soup also inhibits the action of neutrophils, which are white blood cells that may cause symptoms such as coughing and a stuffy nose.

Chicken soup's ability to inhibit these cells could partially explain why it is so effective against some cold and flu symptoms ([1Trusted Source](#)).

**BOTTOM LINE:** Chicken soup is a good source of fluids, calories, protein, vitamins and minerals. It is also a natural decongestant and may block cells that cause coughing and a stuffy nose.

## 2. BROTHS

Similar to chicken soup, broths are excellent sources of hydration while you're sick.

They're full of flavor and can contain calories, vitamins and minerals such as [magnesium](#), calcium, [folate](#) and phosphorous ([7](#), [8](#)).

If you drink them while hot, broths also have the wonderful benefit of acting as a natural decongestant because of the hot steam ([4Trusted Source](#)).

Drinking broth is a good way to stay hydrated, and the rich flavors can help you feel satisfied. This is especially helpful if your stomach is unsettled and you are unable to keep down solid foods.

If you're salt-sensitive and buy broth from the store, be sure to buy a low-sodium variety as most broths are very high in salt.

If you're making broth from scratch, it may have even more benefits — including a higher calorie, protein and nutrient content.

Many people rave about the benefits of bone broth and claim it has many healing properties, although currently there are no studies on its benefits (8). Read this article for [more information about bone broth](#).

**BOTTOM LINE:** Drinking broth is a delicious and nutritious way to stay hydrated, and it also acts as a natural decongestant when hot.

### 3. GARLIC

Garlic can provide all sorts of [health benefits](#).

It has been used as a medicinal herb for centuries and has demonstrated antibacterial, antiviral and anti-fungal effects (9[Trusted Source](#), 10[Trusted Source](#)).

It can also stimulate the immune system (11[Trusted Source](#)).

Few high-quality human studies have explored the effects of garlic on the common cold or flu, but some have found promising results.

One study found that people who took garlic got sick less often. Overall, the garlic group spent about 70% fewer days sick than the placebo group (12[Trusted Source](#)).

In another study, people taking garlic not only got sick less often, but they got better 3.5 days faster than the placebo group, on average (13[Trusted Source](#)). Additionally, several studies showed that aged garlic extract supplements can enhance immune function and decrease the severity of colds and the flu (14[Trusted Source](#)).

Adding garlic to chicken soup or broth can both add flavor and make them

even more effective at fighting off cold or flu symptoms.

More details here: [How Garlic Fights Colds and The Flu](#).

**BOTTOM LINE:** Garlic can fight bacteria, viruses and stimulate the immune system. It helps you avoid illness and recover faster when you get sick.

### 4. COCONUT WATER

Staying well-hydrated is one of the most important things you can do when sick. Hydration is especially important when you have a fever, sweat a lot or have vomiting or diarrhea, which can cause you to lose a lot of water and electrolytes.

[Coconut water](#) is the perfect beverage to sip on when you're sick.

Besides being sweet and flavorful, it contains glucose and the electrolytes needed for re-hydration.

Studies show that coconut water helps you re-hydrate after exercise and mild cases of diarrhea. It also causes less stomach discomfort than similar drinks (15[Trusted Source](#), 16[Trusted Source](#), 17[Trusted Source](#)).

Additionally, several studies in animals found that coconut water contains antioxidants that can fight oxidative damage and may also improve blood sugar control (18[Trusted Source](#), 19[Trusted Source](#), 20[Trusted Source](#), 21[Trusted Source](#)).

However, one study found that it causes more [bloating](#) than other electrolyte beverages. It might be a good idea to begin slowly if you've never tried it (22[Trusted Source](#)).

**BOTTOM LINE:** Coconut water has a sweet, delicious flavor. It provides the

fluids and electrolytes you need to stay hydrated while sick.

## 5. HOT TEA

[Tea](#) is a favorite remedy for many symptoms associated with colds and the flu.

Just like chicken soup, hot tea acts as a natural decongestant, helping clear the sinuses of mucus. Note that tea needs to be hot to act as a decongestant, but it shouldn't be so hot that it further irritates your throat ([4Trusted Source](#)).

You don't need to worry about tea being dehydrating. Although some teas [do contain caffeine](#), the amounts are far too small to cause any increased [water loss](#) ([23Trusted Source](#)).

This means that sipping on tea throughout the day is a great way to help you stay hydrated while relieving congestion at the same time.

Tea also contains polyphenols, which are natural substances found in plants that may have a large number of health benefits. These range from [antioxidant](#) and anti-inflammatory action to anti-cancer effects ([24Trusted Source](#), [25Trusted Source](#), [26Trusted Source](#), [27Trusted Source](#)).

Tannins are one type of polyphenol found in tea. In addition to acting as antioxidants, tannins also have antiviral, antibacterial and anti-fungal properties ([28Trusted Source](#)).

One study in rats found that tannic acid in black tea could decrease the amount of a common type of bacteria that grows in the throat ([29Trusted Source](#)).

In another study, hibiscus tea reduced the growth of avian flu in a test tube. Echinacea tea also shortened the length of cold and flu symptoms ([30Trusted Source](#), [31Trusted Source](#)).

In addition, several types of teas specifically developed to relieve cough or throat pain were shown to be effective in clinical studies ([32Trusted Source](#), [33Trusted Source](#)).

All of these effects make tea an important part of your diet when you're sick.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Tea is a good source of fluids and acts as a natural decongestant when hot. Black tea can decrease the growth of bacteria in the throat, and echinacea tea may shorten the length of the cold or flu.

## 6. HONEY

Honey has potent antibacterial effects, likely because of its high content of antimicrobial compounds.

In fact, it has such strong antibacterial effects that it was used in wound dressings by the ancient Egyptians, and is still used for this purpose today ([34Trusted Source](#), [35Trusted Source](#), [36Trusted Source](#), [37Trusted Source](#), [38Trusted Source](#)).

Some evidence suggests that honey can also stimulate the immune system ([38Trusted Source](#)).

These qualities alone make [honey an excellent food](#) to eat when sick, especially if you have a sore throat caused by a bacterial infection.

Many studies show that honey suppresses coughing in children. However, remember that honey should not be given to children under 12 months old ([39Trusted Source](#), [40Trusted Source](#), [41Trusted Source](#), [42Trusted Source](#), [43Trusted Source](#)).

Mix about half a teaspoon (2.5 ml) of honey with a warm glass of milk, water or a cup of tea. This is a hydrating,

cough-soothing, antibacterial drink ([43Trusted Source](#)).

**BOTTOM LINE:** Honey has antibacterial effects and stimulates the immune system. It can also help relieve coughing in children over 12 months of age.

## 7. GINGER

[Ginger](#) is probably best known for its anti-nausea effects.

It has also been shown to effectively relieve nausea related to [pregnancy](#) and cancer treatment ([44Trusted Source](#), [45Trusted Source](#), [46Trusted Source](#), [47Trusted Source](#)).

What's more, ginger acts similar to non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. It has also demonstrated antioxidant, antimicrobial and anti-cancer effects ([44Trusted Source](#), [48Trusted Source](#)).

So if you are feeling nauseous or throwing up, ginger is the best food available to relieve these symptoms. Even if you aren't nauseous, ginger's many other beneficial effects make it one of the top foods to eat when sick. Use fresh ginger in cooking, brew some ginger tea or pick up some ginger ale from the store to get these benefits. Just make sure that whatever you're using contains real ginger or ginger extract, not just ginger flavor.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Ginger is very effective at relieving nausea. It also has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects.

## 8. SPICY FOODS

Spicy foods like chili peppers contain capsaicin, which causes a hot, burning sensation when touched.

When high enough in concentration, capsaicin can have a desensitizing effect and is often used in pain-relieving gels and patches ([49Trusted Source](#)). Many people report that eating spicy foods causes a runny nose, breaking up mucus and clearing out the sinus passages.

While few studies have tested this effect, capsaicin does seem to thin out mucus, making it easier to expel. Nasal capsaicin sprays have been used with good results to relieve congestion and itching ([50Trusted Source](#), [51Trusted Source](#), [52](#)).

However, capsaicin also stimulates mucus *production*, so you may just end up with a runny nose instead of a stuffed one ([51Trusted Source](#)).

Cough relief may be another benefit of capsaicin. One study found that taking capsaicin capsules improved symptoms in people with a chronic cough by making them less sensitive to irritation ([53Trusted Source](#)).

However, to achieve these results, you probably would need to eat spicy food daily for several weeks.

Additionally, don't try anything spicy if you already have an upset stomach. Spicy food can [cause bloating](#), pain and nausea in some people ([54Trusted Source](#)).

**BOTTOM LINE:** Spicy foods contain capsaicin, which can help break up mucus but also stimulate mucus production. It may be effective at relieving coughing caused by irritation.

## 9. BANANAS

Bananas are a great food to eat when you're sick.

They're easy to chew and bland in flavor, but also provide a decent amount of calories and nutrients.

For these reasons, they are part of the BRAT diet (bananas, rice, applesauce, toast) that is often recommended for nausea ([55](#)).

Another big [benefit of bananas](#) is the soluble fiber they contain. If you have diarrhea, bananas are one of the best foods you can eat because the fiber can help relieve diarrhea ([56Trusted Source](#), [57Trusted Source](#), [58Trusted Source](#)).

In fact, some hospitals use banana flakes to treat patients with diarrhea ([59Trusted Source](#)).

**BOTTOM LINE:** Bananas are a good source of calories and nutrients. They can also help relieve nausea and diarrhea.

## 10. OATMEAL

Like bananas, [oatmeal](#) is bland and easy to eat while providing the calories, vitamins and minerals you need when sick.

It also contains some protein — about 5 grams in a 1/2 cup ([60](#)).

Oatmeal has some other powerful health benefits, including stimulating the immune system and [improving blood sugar control](#) ([61Trusted Source](#)).

One rat study also showed that beta-glucan, a type of fiber found in oats, helped decrease inflammation in the gut. This could help relieve symptoms such as intestinal cramping, bloating and diarrhea ([62Trusted Source](#)).

However, avoid buying artificially flavored oatmeal with lots of [added sugar](#). Instead, add a small amount of honey or fruit to provide even more benefits.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Oatmeal is a good source of nutrients and easy to eat. It can stimulate your immune system, improve blood sugar control and decrease inflammation in the digestive system.

## 11. YOGURT

Yogurt is an excellent food to eat when sick.

It provides 150 calories and 8 grams of protein per cup. It's also cold, which can soothe your throat.

Yogurt is also [rich in calcium](#) and full of other vitamins and minerals ([63](#)).

Some yogurts also contain [beneficial probiotics](#).

Evidence shows that probiotics can help both children and adults get colds less often, heal faster when sick and take fewer antibiotics ([64Trusted Source](#), [65Trusted Source](#), [66Trusted Source](#), [67Trusted Source](#), [68Trusted Source](#)).

One study found that children taking probiotics felt better an average of two days faster, and their symptoms were about 55% less severe ([64Trusted Source](#)).

Some people have reported that dairy intake thickens mucus. However, several studies show that dairy intake causes no change in cough, congestion or mucus production, even among those who are sick ([69Trusted Source](#)).

Nonetheless, if you feel that dairy products worsen your congestion, try other [fermented foods containing probiotics](#) or a probiotic supplement instead.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Yogurt is easy to eat and a good source of calories, protein,

vitamins and minerals. Some yogurts also contain probiotics, which can help you get sick less often and get better faster

## 12. CERTAIN FRUITS

Fruits can be beneficial when sick. They are rich sources of vitamins, minerals and fiber, which support your body and immune system ([70Trusted Source](#)).

Some fruits also contain beneficial compounds called anthocyanins, which are types of flavonoids that give fruits their red, blue and purple color. Some of the best sources are strawberries, cranberries, [blueberries](#) and blackberries ([71Trusted Source](#)).

Anthocyanins make berries excellent foods to eat when sick because they have strong [anti-inflammatory](#), antiviral and immune-boosting effects.

Several studies found that fruit extracts high in anthocyanins can inhibit common viruses and bacteria from attaching to cells. They also stimulate the body's immune response ([72Trusted Source](#), [73Trusted Source](#), [74Trusted Source](#), [75Trusted Source](#), [76Trusted Source](#), [77Trusted Source](#)).

In particular, [pomegranates](#) have strong antibacterial and antiviral effects that inhibit food-borne bacteria and viruses, including *E.*

*coli* and *salmonella* ([78Trusted Source](#)).

While these effects do not necessarily have the same impact on infections in the body as in the lab, they likely do have some impact.

In fact, one review found that flavonoid supplements can decrease the number of days people are sick with the cold by a whopping 40% ([79Trusted Source](#)).

Add some fruit to a bowl of oatmeal or yogurt for more added benefits or

blend [frozen fruit](#) into a cold smoothie that soothes your throat.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Many fruits contain flavonoids called anthocyanins that can fight viruses and bacteria and stimulate the immune system. Flavonoid supplements can also be beneficial.

## 13. AVOCADO

[The avocado](#) is an unusual fruit because it is low in carbs but [high in fat](#).

In particular, it is high in healthy monounsaturated fat, the same type of fat found in [olive oil](#).

Avocados are also a good source of fiber, vitamins and minerals ([80Trusted Source](#), [81](#)).

Avocados are a great food when sick because they provide calories, vitamins and minerals that your body needs. They're also soft, relatively bland and easy to eat.

Because of the healthy fats avocados contain, especially oleic acid, they [help to decrease inflammation](#) while also playing a role in immune function ([82Trusted Source](#), [83Trusted Source](#)).

**BOTTOM LINE:** Avocados are full of vitamins, minerals and healthy fats that can decrease inflammation and stimulate the immune system.

## 14. LEAFY, GREEN VEGETABLES

It's important to get all of the vitamins and minerals your body needs while sick, but that can be difficult to do with a typical "sick foods" diet.

Leafy green vegetables such as spinach, romaine lettuce and kale are packed full of vitamins, minerals and fiber. They are especially good sources

of vitamin A, vitamin C, [vitamin K](#) and folate ([84](#)).

Dark green vegetables are also loaded with beneficial plant compounds. These act as antioxidants to protect cells from damage and help fight inflammation ([85Trusted Source](#)).

Leafy greens have also been used for their antibacterial properties ([86Trusted Source](#)).

Add spinach to an omelet for a quick, nutrient-packed, [protein-rich](#) meal. You can also try tossing a handful of kale into a fruit smoothie.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Leafy green vegetables are full of fiber and nutrients that you need while sick. They also contain beneficial plant compounds.

## 15. SALMON

Salmon is one of the best protein sources to eat when sick.

It is soft, easy to eat and full of the high-quality protein your body needs.

Salmon is particularly rich in [omega-3](#) fatty acids, which have strong anti-inflammatory effects ([87Trusted Source](#)).

Salmon is also a good source of many vitamins and minerals, [including vitamin D](#), which many people are lacking in.

Vitamin D plays a role in immune function ([88Trusted Source](#)).

**BOTTOM LINE:** Salmon is an excellent source of protein. It also contains omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D, which fight inflammation and boost immune function.

### Take Home Message

Resting, drinking fluids and getting proper nutrition are some of the most

important things you can do to feel better and recover faster when sick. But some foods have benefits that go beyond just providing your body with nutrients.

While no food alone can cure sickness, eating the right foods can support your body's immune system and help relieve certain symptoms.

Written by [Taylor Jones, RD](#) on June 17, 2016

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