

Antioxidants and Children's Asthma Risk

Stocking up on vitamin C, beta-carotene, and selenium can be beneficial to your child's breathing.

by Susan Smith Coenen

Parents know that children need fruits and veggies, but they should make sure that kids get some nuts and fish, too. Researchers at Cornell University reviewed nutrition data for more than 7,500 kids and found that those who had higher blood levels of vitamin C, beta-carotene, and selenium were 10 to 20 percent less likely to have asthma than kids who had lower levels of these antioxidants.

For children exposed to secondhand smoke, the effect was even more dramatic, particularly for the mineral selenium: Those kids were 50 percent less likely to have the chronic disease.

Nutrition experts speculate that antioxidants may reduce inflammation in kids' airways. Lead study author Patricia A. Cassano, PhD, MPH, says that, given all the positives of eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, it's possible that the benefits extend to protecting airway tissue.

Whatever is at work, fill your kids' plates with vitamin C-rich strawberries, raspberries, and sweet red bell peppers. For beta-carotene, stock up on cantaloupe, mangoes, and pink grapefruit. You can find selenium in nuts, as well as in tuna and other types of fish.