Strengthening Your Child’s Immune System

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The key to a healthy child is a strong immune system

When functioning properly, the immune system fights disease-producing organisms such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites. All children are continuously exposed to these pathogens, but exposure does not mean a child will get sick. A strong immune system provides a child with powerful natural defenses against disease. Conversely, a child with a weakened immune system is vulnerable or more susceptible to colds, flu, and more serious illnesses.
It is virtually impossible to germproof your child. Germs are abundant everywhere, especially in situations such as daycare or preschool. Being exposed to germs is a part of life, and not necessarily unfavorable. Exposure to different viruses and bacteria can actually strengthen a child’s immune system. Furthermore, acquiring innocuous childhood diseases such as chicken pox, measles, mumps and rubella can help to build immunity and give your child lifetime protection against these diseases. Lifetime immunity is important since these diseases can have serious negative effects if acquired as an adult.

If your child is overly susceptible to illness, you may want to take steps to enhance his or her immune system and make it as strong as possible. Prevention is the way to avoid subjecting your child to continuing cycles of antibiotics or other medications. The powerful tools of prevention include breastfeeding, good nutrition, nutritional supplements, a healthy mental attitude and emotional well-being, a nontoxic environment, chiropractic care, avoiding unnecessary antibiotics and vaccines, low stress, and plenty of rest and exercise.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding for as long as possible is crucial to developing a strong immune system. Breastmilk supplies the factors necessary to protect your baby against disease, as well as all the nutrition he or she needs, including the essential fatty acids. Breastfed babies experience fewer infections than babies that are bottle-fed. Feeding a baby artificial milk (formula) deprives him or her of receiving the crucial protection that breastmilk provides.

Nutrition & Nutritional Supplements

Good nutrition is essential to developing and keeping the immune system healthy and strong. Nutritional deficiencies may be responsible for chronic immune problems as it is easier for bacteria or viruses to take hold when important nutrients are missing. Critical nutrients that stimulate a strong immune system include vitamins A, C, E and essential fatty acids. The most important minerals include manganese, selenium, zinc, copper, iron, sulfur, magnesium and germanium. These nutrients can be obtained from an organic wholefoods diet consisting of
fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans, and whole grains. Unfortunately, most of our food supply is artificially manipulated and processed with many ingredients and additives that contribute to poor nutrition. Processed foods, sugar, and soda can weaken the immune system. These “foods” add nothing in the way of nutrition, and if your children fill up on a lot of them, they are not likely to eat healthy foods with essential nutrients. This can lead to a weak immune system. You may want to consult a qualified nutritionist or naturopathic physician to find out if your child has any deficiencies.

Dietary fats can either enhance or impair immune function, depending on the type of fat. The wrong types of fats (hydrogenated oils found in deep fried foods, margarine and baked goods) can predispose a child to recurrent infections and inflammatory conditions. Essential fatty acids (the good fats) are essential to normal immune and nervous system function. They are found in flaxseed oil, evening primrose oil, hemp seed oil, borage seed oil, and fish oil. Cod liver oil is a great way for kids to receive essential fatty acids.

Sugar has been shown to reduce white blood cell count, an indicator of immune strength. The function of white blood cells is to fight and destroy germs that can cause disease. This is why many kids get sick after birthday parties or Halloween. Their resistance is lowered due to excess sugar. Giving your child extra vitamin C and the herb echinacea for a few days before and a few days after these events may help to prevent the onset of an infection.

You may want to consider probiotic supplementation if your child has a history of antibiotic use, ear infections, oral thrush, diarrhea, constipation, colic, food allergies, eczema, intestinal viral infections, candidiasis or is bottle-fed. Probiotics are the beneficial bacteria in the intestinal tract that keep the “bad” bacteria from taking over. This bacterium is essential for healthy immunity. Acidophilus is the probiotic supplement suggested for children over age seven and bifidus for children seven or under. You can find these supplements at your local health food store.

Herbs have been used safely all around the world since ancient times to prevent and treat disease.

Using herbs to strengthen a child’s constitution can make them more resistant to illness. Certain herbs, including echinacea, astragalus, and garlic, have been found to have remarkable immunological effects. These herbs support the body’s own process to stay at the peak of vitality and prevent development of disease.
Nontoxic Environment

More than 75,000 chemicals are permeating our environment. Chemical exposures can damage the immune system, decreasing the ability to fight off common infections and serious diseases such as cancer. Poor indoor and outdoor air quality, contaminated food and water, and constant, cumulative pesticide exposure all contribute to decreased immunity in children. Environmental toxins are everywhere, but there is much you can do to avoid unnecessary exposures and reduce the overall amount of chemicals your children take in to their bodies. There are affordable, nontoxic alternatives to all lawn and garden pesticides, toxic household cleaners and personal care products. Buying organic foods will greatly decrease your child's overall exposure to pesticides and help to create a healthier environment for all children.

Avoid Unnecessary Antibiotics and Vaccines

Antibiotics are excessively prescribed to children. Antibiotic resistance and decreased immunity are some of the consequences of excessive, unnecessary antibiotic use.

Increasing evidence suggests that injecting a child with nearly threedozen doses of 10 different viral and bacterial vaccines before the age of five, while the immune system is still developing, can cause chronic immune dysfunction. The most that vaccines can do is lead to an increase in antibodies to a specific disease. They do not provide true immunity against disease; nor do they create healthier children. In fact, the risks of vaccinations can be very high and parents need to become informed before considering having their children injected with toxic vaccines.

I have seen many anecdotal reports from parents that express unequivocally how incredibly strong their unvaccinated children's immune systems are. My own unvaccinated daughter is remarkably healthy. She’s been “immunized” with four years of breastmilk, an organic whole foods diet, and plenty of love and attention. She has never needed an antibiotic. I know her immune system is strong enough to fight the so-called “deadly” diseases that kids are vaccinated against. If she does get a serious infection, I am confident her strong immune system will respond quickly to treatment.
Chiropractic for Creating Strong Immunity

The nervous system affects the immune system and plays an important role in the immune response. Subtle misalignment of the bones, with tightened muscles and ligaments can lead to irritation of the nerve system and can alter the ability of the nerves to supply the tissues, organs and cells of the body with vital communication from the brain. The scientific study of neuroimmunology (the link between the nervous system and the immune system) clearly indicates that nerve system stress can cause decreased immunity and may increase susceptibility to disease.

Spinal misalignments can occur during childbirth, from tumbles or falls, or from any other normal childhood activity. A chiropractor can detect spinal misalignments and correct them by properly adjusting the spine. With proper nerve supply, the immune system can function at fuller capacity, allowing the body to naturally defend itself against disease.

Mental and Emotional Well-Being

The best nutrition for the immune system is love and attention. Children need to be held, hugged, rocked, massaged, nursed, touched and kissed regularly. When they feel loved and sense that the people around them love each other, they are secure and happy. There have been many studies done that show that laughter and positive thoughts and feelings stimulate the cells of the immune system. The more children laugh and enjoy life, the better their immune function and the healthier they will be.

Emotional stress and unhappiness may deplete the immune system and lower a child’s resistance to disease. An important way to guard against emotional stress and promote positive feelings in an infant or toddler is by frequent and extended breastfeeding. The comfort they receive from this reassures them and can ease the sometimes-stressful situation of being a little person in a big world.
Giving your child a massage is another wonderful way to relieve stress and stimulate the immune system. You can easily learn to massage your baby or child. Find a class in your area or get the book, Infant Massage, A Handbook for Loving Parents, by Vimala Schneider McClure.

 Plenty of sleep is also essential. Your child’s body regenerates and renews itself while sleeping. In addition, it is important to include “quiet time” as part of your child’s day. Kids can easily be taught to practice yoga and meditation. A great yoga video for kids is YogaKids by Living Arts. (800-2-LIVING).

 Plenty of fresh air and exercise can make a big difference in the health of your children. Spending a lot of time inside, breathing stale, recirculated air, can be a hazard to your child’s immune function. Go for walks, play in the woods and let your children climb, jump, run, and dance. Let them hug trees and run barefoot in the grass. Mother Nature can be an excellent immune stimulator.
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