

healthy kids



Natural Immune Boosters for Kids

How to Power Up Their Defenses

by Marlaina Donato

Strong immunity is a cornerstone of optimum health, and may be weakened or enhanced by what we eat and how we manage our emotions. Starting young in incorporating good ongoing habits can go a long way toward building a better immune response to whatever a person encounters.

Kid-Friendly Foods

Organic strawberries, brightly colored peppers, vitamin D-rich eggs or almond trail mix can turn a child's brown bag lunch into an immune-boosting power meal. "Diet is one of the main pillars for children's health. I teach parents and kids that food can be fun, and not to be obsessed with counting calories or portions," says Dr. Alina Olteanu, a holistic pediatrician in Dallas, Texas. "I recommend an anti-inflammatory diet based on lots of colorful vegetables and fruits, and healthy fats like fish, nuts, seeds, avocado and olive oil. Eating fermented foods like sauerkraut, pickled vegetables and kimchi supports a healthy microbiome."

Adequate protein supports healthy immunity, as does reducing inflammatory foods containing monosodium glutamate (MSG), caramel color, sodium nitrite, food dyes and chemical preservatives. Such measures help reduce the burden on a child's immune system. According to Naturopathic Doctor Sarah Anne Rothman, of Thyme Integrative Health, in Pacifica, California, limiting or eliminating processed sugar is also recommended; studies by Loma Linda University, in Loma Linda, California, show that sugar consumption suppresses immune response for five hours.

Olteanu notes, "Desserts can be fruits and a small amount of

dark chocolate, which is rich in antioxidants and actually healthy.” Her favorite sweetener for kids older than 1 year is raw honey; however, she cautions against giving honey to infants during their first year.

Exercise and Herbal Allies

Exercise has been shown to increase blood and lymphatic circulation and in turn, helps move antibodies through the system and do a better job at fighting invaders, according to Harvard Health Publishing. Exercise is also a renowned stress-reliever, especially outdoors, which manifests the bonus of vitamin D fortification from healthy sun exposure. “I strongly encourage all my patients to spend at least an hour a day playing outside,” says Olteanu.

Childhood stress is a real factor that can weaken immunity, yet juvenile anxieties may be dismissed or go unnoticed by adults. Caffeine-free herbal teas and glycerin-based tinctures such as chamomile, lemon balm, passionflower and lavender can be reliable double-duty allies for children, calming them while also promoting immune response.

Essential oils are another boon. “The benefits of using essential oils on children are immense. Many oils are safe for all age groups and can elevate mood, induce relaxation and boost natural defenses,” says holistic nurse and certified clinical aromatherapist Patricia Springer, in Mason, Ohio. Springer recommends diffusing organic lemon or orange essential oil for 30 minutes two to three times a day in the house or applying one to two drops on a cotton ball and inhaling.

Adding a few drops of Roman chamomile or lavender essential oil to Epsom or sea salt makes a calming, immune-boosting bath.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy is a system of natural healing to which kids often respond positively. There are well-known over-the-counter remedies that treat acute conditions without side effects, but certified classical homeopath Julia Eastman, a doctor of Oriental medicine in Naples, Florida, recommends a more thorough approach.

“Homeopathy can be life-changing, but

it’s a system based upon the unique physical, emotional and energetic constitution of the individual. Going to a board-certified classical homeopath is the ideal route, because they can profile the child’s complete constitution, including patterns of illness and personality for the best possible result.”

Treating children’s illness homeopathically when symptoms arise without taking the big picture into account can sometimes cause more harm than good. “Homeopathic remedies are not preventive medicine unto themselves, but using them constitutionally can help to improve overall health, immunity included,” says Eastman, who has witnessed dangerously high fevers in infants relieved within minutes when whole-care homeopathy has been applied.

Health is wealth, and fortifying the next generation benefits us all.

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