

- Child development

Build Baby's Immunity

Practical steps in keeping your child healthy, strong, and virus-free

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Due to the rise in confirmed cases of COVID19, a lot of parents are wondering if there are ways to boost their child's body defenses. There is no way to "boost" the immune system, but these steps may help ensure that your child's immune system functions normally to help prevent infectious diseases.



1. BREASTFEED YOUR BABY

A newborn's immune system is still developing, most especially during the first few months of life. This means that in the event of an infection during this period, the immune system is still unable to mount an effective response against foreign organisms. Although some antibodies are passed on to the baby through the placenta during pregnancy, these are only sufficient for a few weeks or months after birth. Breastmilk contains antibodies and other defensive molecules that enhance the immune system of babies, giving them extra protection from invading microorganisms. It is recommended to breastfeed exclusively for the first six months of life.

2. SERVE A WELL-BALANCED DIET COMPRISED MAINLY OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Fruits and vegetables, as well as other plant-based food such as whole grains, nuts, beans, contain phytonutrients. Phytonutrients have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. They help improve immunity by enhancing the body's production of white blood cells and interferon. These kill bacteria and coat cell surfaces to block out entry of harmful viruses. There are four groups of phytonutrients: carotenoids, ellagic acid, flavonoids, and resveratrol.

Phytonutrients protect the body from disease and cell damage and promote optimal cell growth and repair. Benefits of phytonutrients may be reaped by eating a wide variety of plant based food sources at a minimum of five portions per day. An effective tip would be to fill your child's plate with the colors of the rainbow to gain the most benefit out of phytonutrients.

3. KEEP CHILDREN ACTIVE

Regular physical activity can increase natural killer cells, which are part of the body's defense army that attack microbes. Rather than just encouraging your kids to get physical, exercise with them. This will encourage them to get moving and, with hope, develop an active lifestyle. This can be done in the comforts of your home to maintain social distancing.

4. TRAIN YOUR CHILDREN TO WASH THEIR HANDS PROPERLY

Washing hands with soap reduces stress on your child's immune system by decreasing exposure to microorganisms and preventing them from spreading. Ensure that they wash their hands often, most especially before and after each meal, as soon as they get home from school, after playing outside, after coughing, sneezing or blowing their nose, after handling pets, and after using the bathroom.

5. DO NOT GIVE LARGE DOSES OF VITAMINS

Vitamins and minerals are important for a growing child and may affect how the immune system functions, but they should be getting these from a well-balanced diet. If your child is a picky eater, doctors may supplement with multivitamins. Vitamins A, C, and zinc play important roles in immune function, but taken in excessive amounts can lead to toxicity. Consult your child's pediatrician before giving any supplements.

6. LET THEM GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Studies have shown that lack of sleep can lead to a decrease in natural killer cells. How much sleep would depend on the child's age. An infant may require approximately 15 to 16 hours a day, toddlers require 11 to 14 hours a day, and preschoolers would need 10 to 13 hours a day.

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