

IMPROVING IMMUNITY

Natural Ways to Keep Kids Well

by Kathleen Barnes



For most parents, back-to-school season also signals the start of cold season, which for some kids, can stretch out for months. Kids' immune systems, like their brains, need to be educated and strengthened, which might explain why young children are likely to experience two or three colds a year, says Dr. Lawrence Rosen, a holistic pediatrician practicing in New Jersey and chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Complementary and Integrative Medicine.

Here are some great strategies to keep kids healthy and bolster their immune systems throughout the year.

Manage stress: Stress is probably the biggest challenge to a child's immune system, says Rosen. "Stress plays a big role in immune health. It literally impacts us on the cellular level. Studies repeatedly show that kids get sick more frequently when they are stressed out."

"Give your kids some down time," Rosen advises. "Don't schedule every minute of their time. If you are a compulsive scheduler, then schedule quiet time."

Sleep is a vital component of immune system health, he points out. "Most children need eight hours of sleep a day and surprisingly, teenagers may need as much as 10 hours."

Eat right: Eliminating sugar completely from a child's diet is a huge step toward better health and building a strong immune system, says holistic Pediatrician Debby Hamilton, of Boulder, Colorado.

In California, a Loma Linda University study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* shows that eating or drinking eight tablespoons of sugar (about the amount in two, 12-ounce soft drinks) can:

- Reduce the ability of white blood cells to fight off infection by 40 percent.

Dr. Lawrence Rosen suggests a homemade hand wash blend of essential oils commonly called Thieves Oil. He makes up his own sweet-smelling antibacterial blend from cinnamon, clove, lemon eucalyptus, rosemary and orange oils, mixed with a little aloe vera and water. Keep in a spray bottle next to every sink.

- Lower immune function for up to five hours.
- Block absorption of vitamin C, which plays a vital role in immune function.
- Make cells more permeable to the influx of bacteria and viruses.

Tracee Yablon-Brenner, a registered dietitian, holistic health counselor and co-founder of *RealMoms.com*, offers a few tips to get kids enthusiastic about healthy eating:

- Ask kids to help prepare the food and set the table, with tasks appropriate to their ages.
- Cut vegetables in small pieces and “hide” them in favorite foods; for example, add zucchini and broccoli to spaghetti sauce.
- Grow a garden (even a container garden) and engage children in the fun of growing food.
- Take them to a farmers’ market to help pick out meal ingredients.

Any food high in vitamin C is great for strengthening immune systems and improving overall health. Sources include citrus fruits, berries, bell peppers, cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts and all dark, green, leafy vegetables, especially kale.

Yablon-Brenner thinks that juice is too high in sugar (even natural sugars) and instead favors fiber-rich whole fruits. She encourages eating lots of wild-caught fish (avoiding farmed fish, which can be contaminated with mercury and other toxic substances) and plenty of foods rich in vitamin E

and zinc, such as pumpkin seeds and sunflower seeds.

Probiotics are also important for keeping the immune system strong. For some kids, eating all-natural yogurt is enough, but for others, probiotic supplements may be necessary.

“I’m really passionate about educating and teaching families about the benefits of eating real food and helping them recognize that food is really the best medicine,” says Yablon-Brenner.

Exercise: Daily exercise is a key component of any health regimen.

“Sometimes, I literally write a prescription for family exercise,” says Rosen.

Outdoor exercise is beneficial because it also exposes children to the sun, helping them to manufacture the vitamin D that is essential for a strong immune system. Other highly recommended exercise programs include yoga for stress reduction, which can be adapted even for small children.

Supplements: Rosen and Hamilton both favor select supplements for children, especially during cold and flu season.

Rosen recommends a whole-food multivitamin for kids every day, as well as vitamin D supplements (if blood tests confirm a deficiency), as follows: 400 IU daily for babies, 1,000 IU for young children, 2,000 IU for tweens and 4,000 IU for teens and adults.

Hamilton adds 15 milligrams of zinc daily and likes targeted herbal preparations for preventing and treating colds.

Sanitation: The experts’ advice here may be surprising: They all recommend letting kids get a little dirty.

“Kids are a little too sterile,” says Hamilton. “We used to play in the dirt, get dirt under our nails and expose our immune systems to bacteria that made them stronger. Our focus on antibacterial products today has actually led to the growth of antibiotic-resistant superbugs.” As a postscript, she recommends avoiding hand sanitizers; not only are they less than effective, but their alcohol content can cause dry skin.

Kathleen Barnes is a natural health advocate, author and publisher; 10 Best Ways to Manage Stress is her latest book. Visit KathleenBarnes.com.



Kale Crisps Recipe Kids Like

1 bunch of organic curly kale
Sea salt to taste
Garlic powder to taste
2 Tbsp lemon juice

Preheat oven to 350° F.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Wash and dry kale leaves, place in a single layer on baking sheet and sprinkle with sea salt.

Roast for 8 to 10 minutes, until slightly browned and crispy.

Drizzle with lemon juice and serve.

Source: Tracee Yablon-Brenner, from RealMoms.com