

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF DAYCARE ILLNESS

If there is one thing we know for sure about day care, it is that it is crawling in germs of great density and diversity. The perpetual challenge for most parents is not keeping their child free of infection, but keeping them free of repetitive, unrelenting illnesses that pass through the family over and over again. For many, the benefit of day care comes at the expense of an abiding runny nose or frequent rounds of antibiotics for kids and their parents.

Children's immune systems are in a maximal state of development in the preschool years, carefully studying each microbial introduction and gaining strength with each round of exposure. Despite this heightened training regime, the immature immune system of a preschooler generally lacks the capacity to fight infection with the same degree of efficiency of an adult. Supporting a child's immune system requires equal emphasis on removing those things that tend to weaken immune defenses while simultaneously tonifying, not just the child's, but the entire family's immune health.

Immune Taxers

Keeping both your own as well as your child's immune system in prime condition requires some vigilance when it comes to their food. Sugar and food colorings have both been shown to decrease the overall immune functionality in children. Whole foods, without added sugar are imperative to preventing the subtle decline in immune defense that is vital to protecting your child at school. Natural sugars

such as fructose (found in fruit) or raw honey are certainly better choices, but I generally advise avoiding them in children when you suspect they are on the brink of infection. Processed foods, especially ones high in glucose and corn syrups, are especially problematic to the immune system. Establishing the source and type of sugars can require heightened diligence when it comes to reading labels and busy parents. As a general rule, if the food is white, made of flour or highly processed, it is high in sugar. If you can't start to remove it as part of an overall lifestyle choice, consider a more colorful, whole foods option when you suspect your little person is coming down with an infection.

Antibiotic Support Team

We have witnessed the pattern; a child gets sick, they require antibiotics, they get well, they go back to school, they get sick, they require antibiotics, they get well, they go back to school... The cycle can often feel like it is endless. Antibiotics have their time and place. They are an important feature of Western medicine and critical with highly progressive infections. The problem with antibiotics however is that while they may deter the current infection, their depletion of healthy probiotics within the digestive system leaves the immune system vulnerable to the next attack. If antibiotics are indeed necessary, supplementing with a probiotic following the prescriptions course can help with interrupting the cycle. Probiotics are formulated for kids and adults and it is important that you select one with multiple strains for the correct age grouping. Yogurt is also an excellent source of health probiotics, but the probiotics available in yogurt are not available in sufficient concentrations to adequately replenish the digestive system. Consider yogurt as an adjunctive therapy, but consider supplementing for at least one month following your child (or your) next round of antibiotics.

Foods for Immune Health

Stimulating the immune system in the face of an impending infection is a good idea for most and easily accomplished without the need for supplementation. These are some favorite immune fighting options for kids.

Oranges – These yummy, kid friendly fruits provide a healthy dose of vitamin C. Juice your own or feed kids the orange directly as orange juice is just a little too high in sugar when your little person is on the verge of a cold.

Garlic – Although this can be a challenge for many kids, consider roasting some cloves or adding raw garlic to potatoes or homemade hummus.

Lentils – Lentils are high in the immune supporting mineral called zinc. Add the lentils to soup or cook them in your rice/quinoa to make them a little more palatable for kids.

Avocado – 1/2 of an avocado meets your daily requirement for vitamin E, an important contributor to a steady immune system. If your kids won't eat avocado, consider mixing an avocado with 1/3 cup organic cocoa powder and 1 tbsp of raw honey. Mix together in a food processor or blender – you now have chocolate pudding... I promise, they'll eat it.

Ginger – Ginger is an important anti-microbial. Chop a small amount of ginger and make a tea. Allow it to cool before serving it to kids. Ginger is especially helpful for nausea.

Keeping your child free from daycare-induced illness is an ongoing process. Avoid the sugar, add a probiotic and strategically include immune fighting foods to your child's meal plan. With a little luck, vigilant hand washing, some careful planning and an impending spring, the relentless game of microbial tag may just be gone for good... or at least until next fall.