GOOD NUTRITION HELPS SUPPORT YOUR CHILD’S IMMUNE HEALTH

The immune system is the body’s defense against infections. When it’s working well, the immune system can help protect against illnesses. There are several key factors that help keep a child’s immune system healthy and strong. Some of these factors include:

- adequate rest
- regular physical activity
- good hygiene
- routine vaccinations
- healthy diet

Providing key nutrients as part of a well-balanced diet may help support and maintain your child’s immune health.

OFFERING CHILDREN A VARIETY OF FOODS WILL HELP THEM MEET THEIR NUTRITION NEEDS. CONSIDER FOODS THAT HELP THEM GET:

- **PROTEIN** helps build antibodies and immune cells and plays an important role in healing and recovery.
  
  **Sources:** Eggs, milk, yogurt, fish, lean beef, chicken, turkey, beans, soy products, nuts, and seeds

- **VITAMIN A** keeps the skin, tissues in the mouth, stomach, intestines, and the respiratory system healthy, and it helps regulate the immune system.
  
  **Sources:** Colorful foods like carrots, sweet potatoes, broccoli, spinach, pumpkin, squash, and cantaloupe

- **VITAMIN C** helps build healthy skin, which is a barrier to microorganisms, and helps protect cells from damage due to its role as an antioxidant.
  
  **Sources:** Citrus fruits (such as oranges, grapefruits, tangerines), strawberries, papayas, bell peppers, and Brussels sprouts

- **VITAMIN D** helps with properly regulating immune cell function.
  
  **Sources:** Fortified foods (milk, cereal, orange juice), and fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, tuna)

- **VITAMIN E** protects immune cells from damage due to its role as an antioxidant.
  
  **Sources:** Fortified foods (cereals, fruit juices and margarines), nuts, and seeds

- **ZINC** supports creation of new immune cells, which contribute to the body’s ability to heal from wounds.
  
  **Sources:** Lean beef, chicken, turkey, crab, oysters, milk, whole grains, and seeds

- **PREBIOTIC FIBER** provides fuel for beneficial bacteria in the gut to support the immune system.
  
  **Sources:** Asparagus, bananas, apples, flaxseed, and oats

Talk to your healthcare provider to find appropriate sources of these nutrients if your child has a food allergy. When choosing the foods, select items that are developmentally appropriate for your child.
Eating a well-balanced diet is an important part of creating and maintaining good immune health habits.
Encourage kids to eat a rainbow of fruits and vegetables to increase dietary variety and nutrients.

For children who are unable to meet their recommended nutrient needs from diet alone, the addition of a complete, balanced nutrition supplement can help support growth and the immune system. Talk to your healthcare providers to find out more about nutrition supplements for your child’s diet.

- Fluids help regulate body temperature and assist the body in keeping skin and mucous membranes hydrated.
- Our skin and mucous membranes are an important part of our defense system that protect our bodies against bacteria and viruses.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children consume water to maintain hydration:\(^2\):
  - 1-3 years: 4 cups/day
  - 4-8 years: 5 cups/day
  - 8+ years: 7-8 cups/day
- In addition to water, electrolytes like sodium and chloride help your child’s cells maintain fluid balance.

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