

3 signs to boost immune system in your child

TODDLER

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Frequent sickness, fussy eating, and delayed recovery of injuries are vital signs to boost children's immune system. Improve your child's gut health, diet, and sleep quality to build a strong immune system.

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Do you know a parent who complains about how often their child gets the sniffles? Or are you that parent? That's the grim reality of having kids: children tend to be walking, talking virus and germ incubators, spreading them willy-nilly among friends and grown-ups. But did you know that this is related to their immune system?

Children's immune systems keep them healthy by protecting against infections. A healthy immune system recognises the presence of pathogens like bacteria and viruses. It then develops antibodies to protect against them. After ridding the body of the invading pathogen, the antibodies help preserve a memory of the recent invader, so that it can cope better the next time it is faced with the germ.

To protect your children from such infections, it's essential to know the importance of building your child's immune system. But how can you tell if your child's immune system needs a little extra TLC? Here are a few signs to look out for.

Frequent sickness

The average child has four to eight respiratory infections per year.¹ This number may vary, depending on factors like what infections the child is exposed to; risk factors include whether or not they attend school, or have siblings who do. On average, pre-school kids in Singapore catch at least six colds a year.²

Children with normal immune systems recover from such illnesses quickly, and are back in the pink of health in no time at all. If your child seems to catch every bug that

goes around and is constantly having a cold/runny nose or gastro-intestinal or ear infections, it might be time to boost their immune system to protect them from further sickness, and help them recover quickly when they get ill too.

Cuts don't heal easily

Cuts and scrapes are part of the growing-up process but, thankfully, children tend to recover from them quickly. If it's taking longer than usual for your child's wound to heal, it could be because of their immune system. Our immune system plays a big role in the wound-healing process as well as skin repair³. So, if your child has low immunity, it will take longer for such cuts and scrapes to get better.

Fussy eating

It's common for children to prefer fast food to fruits and vegetables, but your child needs to consume a variety of foods in order to grow and develop well. Children who are picky with what they eat may eventually suffer from a weakened immune system.⁴ This is because they're not getting the nutrients they need in order to boost their immunity.

So how can I boost my child's immune system?

Keeping your child's immune system ready for most threats isn't rocket science. Keep these tips in mind to ensure they won't be felled by the first pathogen that comes their way.

Feed them right. Serve your child fresh real food, and keep processed or packaged food to a minimum. Load them up on fruits and vegetables, especially – five servings (one serving is around two tablespoons for toddlers and one cup for older children) a day is a good guide to follow.⁵ And ensure that treats such as cakes and cookies are only occasional foods.

Make sure they sleep well. A child who is lacking in sleep is more prone to illness, as lack of sleep lowers the number of natural killer cells that are needed for the immune system to deal with infections. Newborns should get 18 hours of sleep a day, toddlers need up to 13 hours and children aged three to 12 should have up to 12 hours a day.⁶

Improve their gut health. Did you know that around 70% of our body's immune

cells are located in the gut?⁷ This is why good gut health is an extremely important contributor to a healthy immune system.

The trillions of bacteria in our gut are collectively known as our gut microbiota. There should always be more good than bad bacteria in our gut, to have a positive impact on our immune system. Therefore, we should introduce foods such as probiotics and prebiotics in our children's diet, to boost this bacteria count.

Probiotics are themselves a form of good bacteria, and prebiotics are non-digestible food ingredients that act as fertilisers to stimulate the growth of this good bacteria.⁸ Feed your child prebiotic foods such as yoghurt and kefir.

Or, in cases where breastfeeding is not possible, give them a formula milk that is supplemented with a form of prebiotic known as Human Milk Oligosaccharides (HMOs). Not only do HMOs boost your child's immune system, they have cognitive benefits too!⁹

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