

5 Ways to Protect Your Kids (and Yourself!) from the Flu



The season is changing and we have finally arrived at that bittersweet time of Daylight Savings. I always feel like this simple one-hour time change throws me into a pretty significant physiological shift. For me, it also marks the beginning of the **flu** and **cold season**.

Ever wonder why the winter months are when we get sick the most? While many experts have their myriad reasons, the culprit is not as simple as "it's cold outside."

There are few steps that you can take to protect yourself and your **family** from what seems to be the inevitable **flu**. The guardian of the **health** of our body is the immune system.

While intangible and challenging to identify, the immune system has very specific signs and symptoms.

For a moment, put aside the traditional considerations for assessing your **child's** health.

Instead, I'd like you to consider some new approaches and angles that will provide you with insight into the likelihood that your **child** will stay healthy or get sick this winter season.

1. Sugar and processed foods impact the immune system.

Studies have shown that through a complex system of chemical processes sugar and processed **foods** depress the immune system. There exists a direct link between the amount of these foods that your child consumes and his/her health.

Obvious foods such as sodas, candy, cookies, ice cream, and potato chips are the big guns that should be kept concealed.

Even more disturbing are the foods that you think are **healthy** for your child that hide sugar and many refined ingredients: yogurt, and yogurt drinks and "pops;" most cereals; juices; fruit roll ups and "leathers;" "healthy" cookies and treats, soy ice cream and frozen treats. While being marketed as healthy choices, these foods aren't much better than the obvious poor choices. Work hard during flu season to keep these foods away from your children. Read ingredient labels and watch out for: corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup or "HFCS," brown rice syrup, fructose, sucrose, barley malt and the obvious, sugar.

2. Fresh **foods** offer the highest quality vitamins.

It's shocking to me how often I see people turn to orange juice for vitamin C in an effort to fight off a cold or flu.

It is important to understand that **the majority of vitamin C in orange juice is added after processing**. Vitamin C and others like zinc, vitamin E, and magnesium help to support the immune system and are a great defense during flu season.

Choose better by having kids eat fresh whole foods such as cherries, berries, and apples, and vegetables such as spinach, kale, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, carrots and sweet potatoes.

I know you probably hear this suggestion all the time, but it can't be stressed enough. It is imperative to find creative ways to prepare vegetables so that kids will actually eat them.

Sautee, roast or grill vegetables with olive oil or real butter, add some fresh sea salt or sprinkle with organic low fat cheese and kids will be more likely to eat.

3. Sleep will boost the immune system.

At night while we rest, the body is working to rebuild the immune system. Deep sleep allows a complex set of hormonal changes that recharge the body so that it's resilient the next day. Be diligent and ensure that **kids** get a full night sleep of 8-10 hours.

Mandate bedtime despite protests and stick to a regular schedule. These are the times that mom and dad really need to be the boss. Resist the temptation to allow your child to stay up late and watch his or her favorite show. At the end of the day when you are tired as well, it's easy to give in to your child's vigilant campaign.

Remember: Would you rather avoid the confrontation tonight? Or deal with a sick kid tomorrow?

4. Fatigue is the first sign of a distressed immune system.

As already stated, the immune system desperately needs sleep to keep the body healthy. When the **immune** system is fighting to keep your child healthy, it requests that the body get extra rest to help in the fight.

If your child seems more fatigued than usual, it could be a very strong signal that your child is on the brink of getting sick.

The best way to fight off a cold or flu is to act immediately and get extra rest. Pay attention to the health of others around you such as those at work or your child's school. If you hear of a bug "going around" and you notice that your child is tired, **there's a good chance that extra sleep will ward off the cold or flu.** This is the time to allow extra television and require a mid-day nap.

5. Wash hands frequently, but avoid antibacterial products.

This seems counterintuitive, but the best way to kill environmental germs is to use soap and hot water and scrub hands thoroughly. **Bacteria** live all around us. They are on every surface we touch and in every breath we take. Without bacteria, our immune system wouldn't learn to be strong.

Our internal bacterial system fights off invaders and thereby gets more effective at winning the battle. It's just like working out: In order to become stronger, you must work hard in the gym. Your child's body is a bacterial gym. Again, this comes back to the immune system. If you foster a strong immune system, your child's body will fight off invaders and therefore become more resilient to future battles. While it is imperative to wash hands frequently during flu season, remember that the hands are only one very small way that germs enter your child's system. Killing off the germs on hands with antibacterial products is futile and weakens your child's- and the world's- future ability to confront germs.

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