



A Healthy Perspective: Building Strong Immune Systems

By Michael Allen, MD

Spring is upon us with longer, warmer days...yet there is still crispness in the morning air reminding us that there is still another six weeks of cold and flu season. So how do we keep ourselves healthy through this time of transition, and throughout the rest of the year? The key is to nourish our body, soul, and spirit – and to be nourished we must strive for balance in our lives. In holistic medicine, balance leads to health or ‘ease,’ and imbalance leads to illness or dis –‘ease.’

We are nourished with warmth and rhythms. Layers keep the chill out and preserve the energy that would have had to be expended on keeping us warm, allowing us to use it instead to support our growth, development and overall health. So dress your child in enough layers to keep their hands and feet as warm as their chest. Consistent rhythms allow our children to actively anticipate, then participate and feel safe in their activities. Practicing pediatrics over the last eighteen years, I have seen in my own family, as well as in my patients families, that when we do not have rhythm in our lives, it stresses the body, depletes our energy, and can lead to imbalance and illness. Therefore, develop ongoing morning, after-school, dinner, bedtime, and weekend routines that work and support the family.

Eating nutritious food and sleeping well is also essential for good health. Strive for a varied diet of whole fruits and vegetables and meat (if you eat it), avoid processed foods and limit sugar, and eat organic when you can. Taking probiotics can help support the health of our gut, allowing it to better digest and absorb and thus nourish our bodies. Good quality as well as an adequate quantity of sleep is vital to allow our brains to integrate what we have learned, and help our bodies regenerate and heal, as all of these activities happen while we are asleep. Each of us should be able to awake without an alarm, and feel fully rested throughout the day. The average amount of sleep to be well rested varies by age: kindergarten 12 hours; 1st-6th grade 10 hours; and adolescents 9 hours per night. Most adults need 8 hours of sleep per night.

Decrease stress and depression, and promote health by taking time to play and exercise: running, jumping, drawing, painting, or reading a book, etc. When was the last time, any of us climbed a tree or swung on a swing? What is good for our children is indeed also good for us. Spend time playing games with the family. And don't forget about the importance of touch. We crave touch and physical connection with others...holding hands, snuggling while reading, playing games, or just talking. A good hug can nourish the soul and sometimes change our perspective for the better.

In the developed world, there is so much to do and so many choices of how to occupy our time. Time is precious and there never seems to be enough of it when over committed. We have things we have to do: school, work, or both. No one can forget about homework. Then there are choices: hobbies, extracurricular activities (sports, school play, etc.), hanging out with friends, and helping others. Each can take up huge amounts of time, and if we over do it, we become unbalanced and can become ill. The goal is to be present and nourished by all we do, without depleting ourselves, so prioritize to maintain your family's health.

Each of us is born with our own constitution and mix of temperaments. Although these cannot be changed, it is important to understand and support them. Our goal is to learn to balance each of these as we journey through this life. We also born with gifts and challenges that serve as a way to both learn what each of us needs to learn in this lifetime and to give back to the world making it a better place for all.

It is very important to minimize stress and screen time (TV, video games, computer). Our brains have mirror neurons and when watching TV or video games, these mirror neurons are stimulated as though what we are watching is ACTUALLY happening to us. You unknowingly become an active participant in the movie or game that you thought you were just passively watching. What may be intended as a relaxing activity can actually stress your child and pour adrenaline into their bloodstream.

Overloading activities, screen time, lack of sleep, eating unhealthy foods, when our bodies are cold, the lack of physical activity, caffeine and spending too much time in the past or future, i.e., not present, all trigger our sympathetic “fight or flight” stress nervous system. These stresses can depress your child's immune system, increase anxiety and affect school performance. In order to heal and to be in balance, each of us needs to be in the parasympathetic, or calm nervous system. Deep belly breathing exercises, as well as all of the other recommendations in this article, can help us spend more time in this calm and healing nervous system.

Remember to be grateful for all you have been blessed with in this life. Everything happens for a reason, and we can learn from every experience and every person we encounter along our path. Prevent the loss of vital energy by letting go of guilt and blame, by forgiving

others as well as ourselves, and by accepting responsibility for everything in our lives. As we align all aspects of our lives in a more congruent expression of who we are striving to be, we restore our balance and health.

When someone is out of balance and confronted with an illness, they are given the opportunity to slow down and to re-evaluate their life. If they realize that they are too busy or too stressed, they can make positive choices that may have a huge impact on their health. There are natural remedies (homeopathics, herbs, etc.) and therapies (craniosacral, eurythmy, rhythmical massage, etc.) that can be used to support our bodies in achieving balance once again. And if our bodies are too overwhelmed, some types of conventional medicine can be utilized to temper the crisis, thus allowing the more natural remedies and therapies to once again help us come back into balance.

One of our most important roles as a parent is to nurture our children from birth, when they are helpless and totally dependent on us, to eighteen when they need to be completely ready to healthily interact with the world on their own. A daunting task, but it is helpful knowing that we can support and nourish our children with a little understanding of their growth, development and transitions that occur, so that we all can succeed with this life-changing opportunity.

So nourish your body, soul, and spirit by taking a dose of this healthy perspective, and allow the balance to restore and maintain your health.

Michael Allen, MD is board certified in Pediatrics, Integrative Holistic Medicine and Anthroposophic Medicine. He is in practice at Center for Living Health, a unique medical practice blending Holistic, Anthroposophic and Conventional Pediatrics. The center also offers Neuro Craniosacral Therapy and Heart Centered Emotional Healing. For more information please visit their website www.centerforlivinghealth.com or call 916.803.7040