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KIDS' GUT HEALTH & IMMUNITY

Less Medicine. More Prevention. Real Food. Healthy Habits.

**A Parent's Guide to Children's Gut Health,
Immunity and Wellbeing**

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This guide is intended for **educational and informational purposes only**. The information provided is **not medical advice** and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical evaluation, diagnosis, treatment, or recommendations from your physician, pediatrician, or another qualified healthcare professional.

Every child and every adult has unique nutritional needs, medical conditions, health history, lifestyle factors, and personal circumstances. For this reason, **always consult your physician, pediatrician, or another qualified healthcare professional before making significant changes to your diet, lifestyle, or supplement routine**, especially for children, pregnant or breastfeeding women, individuals with chronic health conditions, or those taking prescription medications.

The information presented in this guide is based on **the best available scientific evidence at the time of publication**, together with my professional education, training, and personal experience. It is intended as **general educational guidance** and should not be interpreted as individualized medical or nutritional advice. Recommendations related to nutrition, lifestyle, and supplements should always be considered within the context of your own health needs and discussed with your healthcare provider when appropriate.

Individual results may vary depending on age, health status, genetics, medications, lifestyle, and many other individual factors. Because nutrition science is constantly evolving, recommendations may change as new high-quality evidence becomes available.

References and source links are provided throughout this guide for readers who wish to explore the research in greater detail. I encourage you to continue learning, ask questions, and work together with your healthcare provider to determine what is most appropriate for you and your family.

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A Letter from the Author

Dear Parents,

Hi, I'm Dragana — a Wellness Specialist and certified Pediatric Nutrition professional passionate about helping families support their children's health through evidence-based nutrition and simple everyday habits.

As both a mother and a pediatric nutrition professional, I've learned how deeply connected gut health is to a child's overall wellbeing.

The digestive system does far more than simply digest food. It helps the body absorb nutrients, supports energy production, protects the body from harmful invaders, and plays a major role in immune health.

In fact, more than 70% of the immune system is located in the gut, which is why digestive health and immunity are so closely connected.¹

Today, many children struggle with issues such as constipation, frequent illnesses, stomach discomfort, picky eating, skin concerns, bloating, and imbalanced eating habits — often without parents realizing how connected these symptoms may be to gut health and daily lifestyle habits.

This guide was created to explain gut health and children's immunity in a simple, realistic, and approachable way — while helping families better understand how nutrition, sleep, movement, stress, outdoor time, and healthy routines can support a healthier digestive system and stronger immune function.

My goal is not to create fear around food or perfection around parenting, but to help families focus on simple habits that can support children's long-term health in a balanced and realistic way.

I hope this guide helps you better understand the important role gut health plays in digestion, immunity, growth, and overall wellbeing.

Warm regards,

Dragana Valuh

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33803407/https://www.aap.org/en/search?context=Healthy+Children&source=Healthychildren.org&k=GUT+HEALTH+AND+IMMUNITY>

Introduction: Gut Health and Immunity in Children

Early childhood is a very important period for immune system development, and the digestive system plays a major role in that process.

When the balance of good bacteria in the gut becomes disrupted, the body may become more vulnerable to inflammation and infections. This imbalance can happen due to frequent antibiotic use, chronic stress, poor sleep, or a diet high in ultra-processed foods and low in fiber-rich foods.

Over time, poor gut health may contribute to:

- **frequent colds and respiratory infections**
- **recurring ear infections**
- **digestive discomfort**
- **skin issues**
- **allergies**
- **low energy levels**

Supporting a healthy gut microbiome — **One of the best ways to support a healthy gut microbiome in children is through everyday nutrition and lifestyle habits.**

A balanced diet rich in fiber, adequate sleep, physical activity, outdoor time, stress reduction, and limiting ultra-processed foods can all play an important role in supporting digestive health and strengthening the body's natural immune defenses.



What Is the Gut Microbiome?

The digestive tract is home to trillions of microorganisms — including bacteria, viruses, fungi, and other microbes — that together form the gut microbiome.²

Although the word "bacteria" often sounds negative, many bacteria in the gut play a very important and beneficial role in a child's health. These "good bacteria" help the body digest food, absorb nutrients, and maintain balance within the digestive system.

The gut is constantly in contact with food, bacteria, and various substances from the outside environment. Because of this, the digestive system acts as one of the body's main protective barriers.

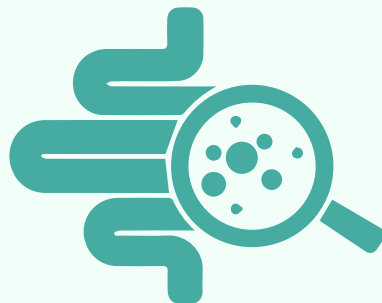
Although many people associate gut health only with digestion, researchers now know that the gut microbiome influences many aspects of health, including immune function and overall wellbeing.

Good bacteria, together with the intestinal lining, protective mucus layer, and immune cells, help the body recognize what is safe and what may be potentially harmful.

When the gut microbiome is balanced, it can help support:

- **healthy digestion**
- **immune function**
- **protection against harmful microorganisms**
- **reduction of inflammation**
- **overall health and development in children**

For this reason, gut health is about much more than digestion alone — it plays an important role in overall health, immunity, and everyday functioning of the body.



² https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article-abstract/129/5/950/73825/The-Human-Microbiome-and-Its-Potential-Importance?redirectedFrom=fulltext&utm_source=chatgpt.com?autologincheck=redirected

The Gut – Brain Connection

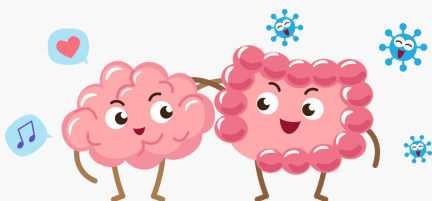
In recent years, scientists have become increasingly interested in what is known as the gut-brain axis — the complex communication system between the digestive system and the brain.³

Although the gut and the brain may seem unrelated at first glance, they are constantly communicating and exchanging information through a network of nerves, hormones, immune signals, and other chemical messengers.

Many parents observe this connection in everyday life. Children may experience stomach aches before an important event, their first day of school, a performance, a competition, or during times when they feel excited, nervous, or stressed. On the other hand, digestive discomfort can sometimes affect a child's mood, behavior, sleep, and overall wellbeing.

Researchers continue to study the role of the gut microbiome in this communication between the gut and the brain. While there is still much to learn, current research suggests that a healthy and diverse gut microbiome may play an important role not only in digestive and immune health, but also in overall wellbeing.

This is one more reason why everyday habits such as eating a varied, fiber-rich diet, getting enough sleep, staying physically active, spending time outdoors, and supporting a healthy gut microbiome are important for children's healthy development and long-term wellbeing.



³ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/the-gut-brain-connection>

Antibiotics & Gut Health

One of the first things I want to share with you as a mom is the fear I personally experienced in the past when it came to the use of antibiotics.

My older daughter was a healthy and happy child. She started daycare at one year old, in a very small group of children, but everything that comes with being in a group setting was simply unavoidable. I cannot say that she was constantly sick, but what we struggled with most often were ear infections. I think even now, at 12 years old, she still does not know how to properly blow her nose — so you can imagine what that looked like back then. In those situations, antibiotics were truly necessary.

As a parent, I often felt worried and anxious every time she needed to take antibiotics. I wondered how they might affect her body, immune system, and gut health.

Over time, through both education and personal experience, I realized something very important — antibiotics can be incredibly valuable and sometimes absolutely necessary for treating bacterial infections, but they may also affect the balance of beneficial bacteria in the gut.

Important

The goal is not to create fear around antibiotics, but rather to understand how we can support the body during and after their use.

Antibiotics can disrupt the balance of the gut microbiome because, in addition to harmful bacteria, they may also affect beneficial bacteria that play an important role in digestion and immune function.

After taking antibiotics, some children may experience symptoms such as diarrhea, cramping, bloating, nausea, or stomach discomfort, which can be related to changes in the gut microbiome.

One way to support gut health is by focusing on a diet rich in natural probiotics and fiber that help nourish beneficial gut bacteria. Foods such as yogurt, kefir, fermented vegetables, and other fermented foods may help support a healthy microbiome, while fiber from fruits, vegetables, oats, legumes, and other whole foods serves as food for beneficial bacteria.⁴

⁴ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/Can-probiotics-help-prevent-tummy-trouble.aspx>

What We Do in Our Family?

Personally, whenever one of my daughters needs an antibiotic, I also choose to include a probiotic as part of their routine. This is a decision we made together with our healthcare provider and one that has worked well for our family. Some research suggests that probiotics may help reduce the risk of antibiotic-associated diarrhea during antibiotic treatment.

One simple habit we follow is spacing the probiotic and the antibiotic by at least two hours, so the antibiotic is less likely to affect the beneficial bacteria in the probiotic.

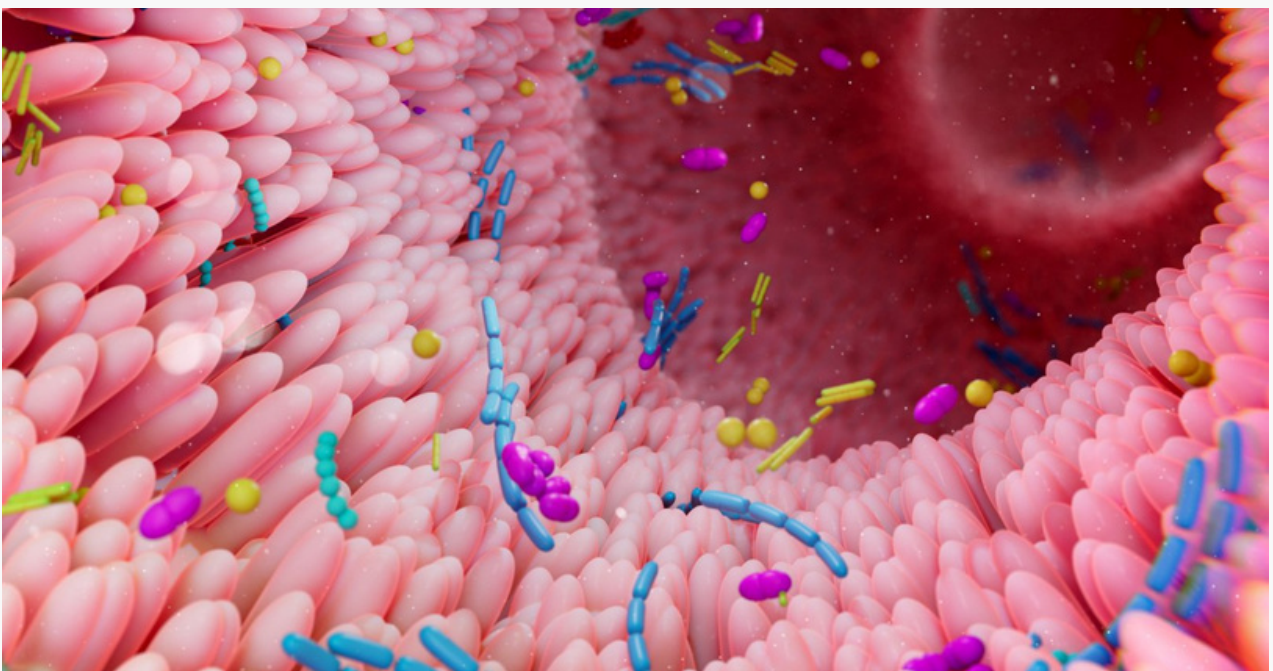
We also usually continue the probiotic for one to three weeks after the antibiotic course is finished to help support the recovery of the gut microbiome.

Every child is different, and there is no single probiotic or routine that is right for everyone. It is always important to discuss probiotic use, the appropriate strain, timing, and duration with your child's pediatrician or healthcare provider.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3601687/>

⚠ Important

While probiotics are generally considered safe for most healthy children, they may not be appropriate for every child. Children with weakened immune systems, serious medical conditions, or those who are hospitalized should only use probiotic supplements under the guidance of their healthcare provider.



How to Feed the Good Bacteria

Why Fiber and Prebiotics Matter

Fiber is an important part of a healthy diet and plays a key role in supporting digestive health and a healthy gut microbiome. It is naturally found in plant foods such as fruits, vegetables, legumes, oats, nuts, seeds, and whole grains.⁵

In addition to helping with fullness and supporting regular bowel movements, certain types of fiber serve as food for the beneficial bacteria living in the gut. This helps maintain a healthy and diverse gut microbiome.

Unfortunately, most children and adults do not consume enough fiber, even though it is important from the earliest years of life. There are two main types of fiber, and both play important roles in the body.



⁵ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3262613/>

Soluble Fiber

Soluble fiber helps nourish beneficial gut bacteria and supports a healthy gut microbiome. Some of the most well-known types include inulin, beta-glucan, pectin, plant gums, wheat dextrin, and psyllium.

When beneficial bacteria use certain types of soluble fiber as a source of energy, they produce beneficial compounds known as short-chain fatty acids, including butyrate. These compounds help support gut health, strengthen the gut barrier, and contribute to normal immune function.

Good sources of soluble fiber include: **oats, beans and other legumes, apples, pears, carrots, sweet potatoes, avocados, and flaxseeds.**

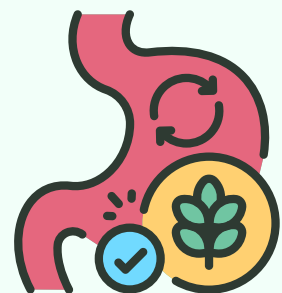
What Is Butyrate?

Butyrate is one of the most beneficial compounds produced when beneficial gut bacteria ferment certain types of fiber. It is a short-chain fatty acid made by beneficial bacteria in the large intestine and is considered one of the most important compounds for digestive health.⁶

Butyrate serves as the primary energy source for the cells lining the colon. It helps maintain a healthy gut barrier, supports normal immune function, and may also help regulate inflammation and contribute to overall gut health.

Research shows that individuals with a less diverse and disrupted gut microbiome often have lower levels of butyrate. Because of its important role in digestive and immune health, butyrate is often considered one of the key markers of a healthy and well-nourished gut microbiome.

Foods that help support butyrate production include fiber-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, oats, and resistant starch sources like green bananas and cooked-and-cooled potatoes. By nourishing beneficial gut bacteria, these foods help support a healthy gut microbiome, digestive health, and normal immune function.



⁶ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7294979/>

Beta-Glucans — Supporting Gut Health and Immunity

Beta-glucans are a special type of soluble fiber naturally found in foods such as oats, barley, mushrooms, and yeast. Because of their potential effects on both gut health and immune function, they are among the most researched natural compounds related to immunity.⁷

Like other soluble fibers, beta-glucans can serve as food for beneficial gut bacteria and help support a healthy and diverse gut microbiome. For this reason, they are considered an important part of a diet that supports digestive health.

What makes beta-glucans particularly interesting is their connection to the immune system. Research suggests that beta-glucans may help the immune system more effectively recognize and respond to potential threats, such as viruses and bacteria.⁸

In children, a healthy and well-functioning immune system plays an important role in everyday protection against illness. Although more research is needed to better understand all of the potential benefits of beta-glucans, their role in supporting gut health and normal immune function continues to attract significant scientific interest.

In addition to their effects on immunity, beta-glucans may also support gut health by promoting the growth of beneficial bacteria and helping maintain a healthy gut environment.

Natural sources of beta-glucans include: oatmeal and oats, barley, certain types of mushrooms, baker's yeast, and nutritional yeast. Regularly including these foods in the diet can be a simple way to support gut health, microbial diversity, and normal immune function.

Resistant Starch — Another Food Source for Beneficial Gut Bacteria

Resistant starch is a unique type of carbohydrate that behaves similarly to fiber. Because it is not fully digested in the small intestine, it reaches the large intestine where it can be used by beneficial gut bacteria as a source of energy.⁹

As resistant starch is fermented by gut bacteria, it contributes to the production of short-chain fatty acids, including butyrate, which play an important role in supporting gut health and maintaining a healthy gut environment.

Foods that naturally contain resistant starch include: green bananas, beans, lentils, and chickpeas, oats and oatmeal, cashews, cooked and cooled potatoes, cooked and cooled rice, and cooked and cooled pasta.

7/8 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7816268/>

9 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26693746/>

Did You Know?

The amount of resistant starch can increase in certain foods after they have been cooked and cooled. During the cooling process, part of the starch changes its structure and becomes more resistant to digestion, making it available for beneficial bacteria in the large intestine to use as a source of energy. Foods such as potatoes, rice, and pasta can contain higher amounts of resistant starch after they have been cooked and cooled.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32040399/>

Insoluble Fiber

Insoluble fiber helps support regular bowel movements by adding bulk to the stool and helping food move through the digestive tract. For this reason, it plays an important role in preventing constipation, which is a common concern in children.

Good sources of insoluble fiber include:

- whole grains and brown rice,
- lentils,
- almonds,
- berries,
- kale and Brussels sprouts,
- and corn and other vegetables.



Constipation

Before sharing some practical information about constipation, I would like to share a small part of my own parenting journey.

For several years, my younger daughter struggled with constipation. There were times when it felt overwhelming. We experienced tears, frustration, setbacks, and many moments when I questioned whether we were doing the right thing. Like many parents, I spent a lot of time searching for answers and trying different approaches.

Over time, I learned that there was rarely a quick fix. I came to understand that nutrition can play an important role in supporting healthy digestion, but I also learned something equally important — patience matters too.

Many challenges that come with raising young children are not solved overnight, and constipation can be one of them. Progress often happens slowly, through small daily habits, consistency, encouragement, and time.

If you are currently going through a similar experience with your child, I hope this section offers both helpful information and reassurance.

Constipation is a common concern in children and can affect not only digestive health, but also a child's comfort, appetite, mood, and overall wellbeing.¹⁰

Many parents think constipation simply means not having a bowel movement every day. However, constipation can also include hard or painful stools, straining during bowel movements, abdominal discomfort, bloating, or a feeling that the bowels are not fully emptied. Because normal bowel habits vary greatly from child to child, it is important to look at the whole picture rather than focusing only on how often a child has a bowel movement.

One of the most common reasons constipation can become an ongoing problem is stool withholding. After experiencing a painful bowel movement, some children may begin avoiding or delaying trips to the bathroom. As stool remains in the colon longer, more water is absorbed from it, making it harder and more difficult to pass. This can create a cycle in which bowel movements become increasingly uncomfortable and constipation worsens over time.

When constipation is not addressed, it may contribute to: abdominal pain and discomfort, bloating, reduced appetite, stool withholding, accumulation of hard stool in the colon, stool leakage or soiling accidents in some children, and emotional stress and reduced quality of life.

¹⁰ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24345831/>

Fortunately, daily habits can play an important role in supporting regular bowel movements. Adequate fiber intake, proper hydration, regular physical activity, and consistent toilet habits can all help support healthy digestion and bowel regularity.¹¹

Encouraging children to sit on the toilet for a few minutes after meals may also help support regular bowel habits, especially in children who tend to withhold stool.

Foods that may help support regular bowel movements include:

- **fruits and vegetables,**
- **beans and other legumes,**
- **whole grains and oats,**
- **prunes and prune products,**
- **and peaches, apricots, and cherries.**

While occasional constipation is common, parents should speak with their child's healthcare provider if constipation becomes persistent, causes significant pain, is associated with blood in the stool, vomiting, poor growth, weight loss, or other concerning symptoms.¹²



Did You Know? — The "Add 5" Fiber Rule

One practical way to estimate a child's daily fiber needs is the "Add 5" rule:

- *A 5-year-old child may need about 10 grams of fiber per day.*
- *An 8-year-old child may need about 13 grams of fiber per day.*
- *A 10-year-old child may need about 15 grams of fiber per day.*

Rather than counting every gram, parents can support healthy digestion by regularly offering a variety of fruits, vegetables, legumes, oats, and whole grains.

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Kids-Need-Fiber-Heres-Why-and-How.aspx>

¹¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3544045/>

¹² <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/abdominal/Pages/constipation.aspx>

Probiotics, Prebiotics, and Synbiotics

What Are Probiotics?

Probiotics are live microorganisms, most commonly beneficial bacteria and certain types of yeast, that can help support a healthy balance of microbes in the gut when consumed in adequate amounts.

The gut microbiome begins developing at birth and continues to change throughout childhood. Many factors can influence its development, including mode of delivery, feeding practices, environment, illnesses, and antibiotic use.

Researchers continue to study how probiotics may support children's health and in which situations specific probiotic strains may be most beneficial. **Probiotics are only one part of the gut health picture — beneficial bacteria also need nourishment from fiber-rich foods and prebiotics to thrive.**



Natural Sources of Probiotics

Certain fermented foods naturally contain beneficial bacteria and may help support gut health. Examples include: **yogurt with live cultures, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, miso, tempeh, and cultured buttermilk.**

For most healthy children, probiotic-rich foods such as yogurt and kefir can be a simple way to help support a healthy gut microbiome. It is important to note that not all fermented foods contain live probiotic cultures, and the amount of beneficial bacteria can vary depending on how the food is produced and stored.



Which Probiotic Strains Have Been Studied the Most?

It is important to remember that not all probiotics are the same. Many of the benefits observed in research are linked to specific probiotic strains rather than probiotics as a whole.¹³

Some of the most studied probiotic strains in children include: ***Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG (LGG)**, ***Lactobacillus reuteri***, ***Bifidobacterium lactis***, ***Bifidobacterium breve***, ***Saccharomyces boulardii* (a beneficial yeast)**, and ***Streptococcus thermophilus***.

Research suggests that different probiotic strains may have different effects. Some of the most studied applications include:

Acute infectious diarrhea: *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG (LGG), *Lactobacillus reuteri*, *Bifidobacterium lactis*, *Lactobacillus casei*, and *Streptococcus thermophilus*.

Antibiotic-associated diarrhea: *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG (LGG), *Bifidobacterium lactis*, *Streptococcus thermophilus*, and *Saccharomyces boulardii*. *Saccharomyces boulardii* is one of the most widely studied probiotics for supporting gut health during antibiotic use and for helping reduce the risk of antibiotic-associated diarrhea.

Infant colic: *Lactobacillus reuteri*.

Eczema (atopic dermatitis): *Lactobacillus fermentum* and *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG (LGG) have been among the most frequently studied strains, although research findings remain mixed.

It is important to remember that benefits observed with one probiotic strain do not mean that every probiotic product will have the same effects. Results seen with a specific strain cannot automatically be applied to all probiotics.¹⁴

Important

The use of probiotic supplements should be carefully considered and discussed with a healthcare professional when appropriate, especially for children with weakened immune systems or chronic health conditions.

¹³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21115585/>

¹⁴ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18461293/>

What Are Prebiotics?

Prebiotics are types of fiber and other compounds that serve as food for beneficial gut bacteria. **Unlike probiotics, which are living microorganisms, prebiotics help nourish and support the growth of the beneficial bacteria already living in the gut.** By feeding beneficial gut bacteria, prebiotics may help support a healthy gut microbiome, digestive health, and normal immune function.

Some of the best-known prebiotics include: inulin, oligofructose, and galactooligosaccharides (GOS).

Natural sources of prebiotics include: onions, garlic, and leeks, asparagus, oats and bananas, beans and other legumes, apples, and chicory root.

A diet rich in fiber, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains can help support a healthy and diverse gut microbiome.

Did You Know?

Human breast milk naturally contains special prebiotic compounds known as Human Milk Oligosaccharides (HMOs). HMOs are the third largest solid component of human breast milk, after lactose and fat, highlighting how important they are for a baby's developing gut microbiome. These compounds serve as food for beneficial bacteria in a baby's gut and play an important role in the development of a healthy gut microbiome during early life.

pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC13023010



What Are Synbiotics?

Synbiotics are a combination of probiotics and prebiotics. The idea behind synbiotics is simple: probiotics provide the beneficial bacteria, while prebiotics help nourish those bacteria and support their growth.

Simply put: **probiotics are the beneficial bacteria, prebiotics are the food that nourishes those bacteria, and synbiotics combine both to help support gut health and the microbiome.**

Some probiotic supplements and functional foods contain both probiotics and prebiotics and are therefore considered synbiotics.

A Food-First Approach

For most healthy children, a varied diet rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, prebiotic fibers, and fermented foods is a simple way to support a healthy gut microbiome. When considering probiotic supplements, it is important to remember that different probiotic strains may have different effects and that not all probiotics have been studied for the same purposes.

⚠ Important

Parents should speak with their child's healthcare provider before introducing probiotic supplements, especially for young children or children with underlying health conditions.



Stomach Viruses in Children

Shortly after we moved to the United States, I experienced a very stressful situation as a parent. At the time, we were still new to the country and trying to understand how everything worked, including the healthcare system and health insurance.

One hot summer night, my younger daughter, Anđela, came down with a stomach virus. She was vomiting, had diarrhea, and could barely keep anything down. Like most parents, we were worried and wanted to make sure everything was okay.

We took her to an urgent care center, where we spent several hours waiting for examinations, results, and answers. In the end, we were told that she had a stomach virus and that she would recover with rest and proper hydration.

What surprised us the most happened just before we left — the doctor brought her a popsicle. I have to admit, we were completely shocked. We came from a country where most parents — including myself at the time — would probably consider popsicles the last thing a child should eat after vomiting and having diarrhea.

*My husband and I simply looked at each other in disbelief. **To this day, we still joke that it was the most expensive ice cream we have ever bought.***

But beyond the stress, the sleepless night, and the unexpected medical bill, that experience taught me several important lessons about stomach viruses, hydration, recovery, and what truly matters when caring for a child going through this type of illness.

What Is a Stomach Virus and What Are the Most Common Symptoms?

One of the most important things I learned is that stomach viruses are usually temporary, but they can be exhausting for both children and parents. A stomach virus can temporarily disrupt the balance of the gut microbiome and irritate the digestive tract. Common symptoms may include: **nausea, vomiting, diarrhea (frequent loose or watery stools), stomach cramps and abdominal pain, reduced appetite, a sensitive stomach, and sometimes fever.**

During a stomach virus, one of the biggest concerns is dehydration. Signs of dehydration may include a dry mouth, fewer wet diapers or trips to the bathroom, crying without tears, unusual sleepiness, or dark-colored urine.¹⁵

For this reason, the focus is often not on how much a child is eating, but rather on maintaining hydration and allowing the digestive system time to recover. As children begin to feel better, food is often best reintroduced gradually. Foods that are commonly easier to tolerate include: **bananas, rice, toast and crackers, boiled potatoes, and clear broths and simple soups.**

¹⁵ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/pages/Dehydration.aspx>

Supporting Recovery During a Stomach Virus

Focusing on Fluids and Electrolytes

Small amounts of fluid offered frequently throughout the day are often easier for children to tolerate than large amounts at once. Electrolyte solutions may help replace fluids and minerals lost through vomiting and diarrhea. For some children, chamomile tea may also help soothe an upset stomach.

Probiotics

During recovery, some families choose to use probiotics. Some of the most studied probiotic strains for acute infectious diarrhea are *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG (LGG) and *Saccharomyces boulardii*. Research suggests that certain probiotic strains may help modestly shorten the duration of diarrhea and support the recovery of the gut microbiome following infection. However, it is important to remember that probiotics are not a substitute for hydration and rest — replacing fluids and electrolytes remains the highest priority.

Rest and Quality Sleep

Rest and sleep play an important role in recovery. Just as the body needs fluids and nutrients, it also needs time to rest and heal. When children are sick, it is easy to focus on food and fluids while forgetting that sleep is also a critical part of the healing process.

A Temporary Break From Dairy Products

Some children may become temporarily more sensitive to dairy products after a stomach virus. Although this varies from child to child, taking a short break from milk and other dairy products may help the digestive system recover more comfortably before returning to the usual diet.

Listen to Your Child and Seek Medical Care When Needed

Parents should contact their child's healthcare provider if symptoms are severe, if there are signs of dehydration, if vomiting or diarrhea become prolonged, or if they have any concerns about their child's recovery. Sometimes the most important thing we can do is stay calm, monitor symptoms, and give the body the time it needs to heal.

Polyphenols and Plant Compounds

Plants contain thousands of naturally occurring compounds known as phytonutrients (phytochemicals). These plant compounds help protect the plant and contribute to many of the color, flavor, and beneficial properties of plant foods. Two well-known groups of phytonutrients are polyphenols and carotenoids.

Polyphenols are naturally occurring plant compounds found in foods such as berries, apples, grapes, tea, cocoa, herbs, spices, and extra virgin olive oil.

Carotenoids include compounds such as beta-carotene, a natural plant pigment found in foods like carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, and spinach. The body can convert beta-carotene into vitamin A, an important nutrient that supports healthy vision, skin, and normal immune function.

Polyphenol-rich foods include:

- **berries — blueberries, raspberries, and strawberries**
- **apples and pears**
- **grapes and plums**
- **citrus fruits**
- **cocoa**
- **green and black tea**
- **extra virgin olive oil**
- **nuts and seeds**
- **herbs and spices**



How Do Polyphenols Support Gut Health?

In recent years, researchers have become increasingly interested in the relationship between polyphenols and the gut microbiome. Research suggests that polyphenols may support gut health by:

- **promoting the growth of beneficial bacteria,**
- **supporting a more diverse gut microbiome,**
- **helping maintain a healthy gut environment,**
- **contributing to the production of short-chain fatty acids, including butyrate,**
- **helping support a healthy gut barrier.**

Interestingly, the relationship between polyphenols and the gut microbiome is a two-way interaction. Polyphenols can influence the composition of the gut microbiome, while gut bacteria help break down polyphenols into compounds that are often easier for the body to absorb and utilize.

Polyphenols and Immune Health

Although polyphenols are not vitamins, minerals, or probiotics, they may indirectly support immune health. Their potential role is linked to supporting a healthy gut microbiome, helping maintain a healthy gut barrier, providing antioxidant activity, and helping support the body's normal response to inflammation.

Emerging research suggests that the interaction between polyphenols and the gut microbiome may be one of the key mechanisms behind many of the health benefits associated with polyphenol-rich foods.¹⁶

When it comes to gut health and immunity, it can be tempting to search for a single solution or a "super supplement." However, a healthy microbiome is not built by one food or one supplement alone. A varied diet rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, fiber, polyphenols, and fermented foods provides beneficial gut bacteria with a wide range of nutrients they need to thrive.

Small, consistent habits practiced day after day often have a far greater impact on long-term health than any single product or short-term solution.

¹⁶ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37552899/>

Final Thoughts

Throughout this guide, we explored how nutrition, fiber, beneficial bacteria, plant foods, and everyday habits can help support children's gut health and immune function.

One of the most important lessons I have learned, both as a mother and as a wellness professional, is that health is rarely built through a single food, one supplement, or a quick fix. More often, health is built through the small choices we make day after day — offering fruits and vegetables, encouraging outdoor play, prioritizing quality sleep, including more fiber-rich foods, and creating healthy habits that children can carry with them throughout their lives.

As parents, we do not need to be perfect. We do not need to do everything at once. We simply need to keep learning, take the next small step, and trust that consistency can lead to meaningful results over time.

Our goal is not to raise "perfectly healthy" children. Our goal is to build strong foundations that help our children grow, thrive, and enjoy the best health possible. Often, it is the small, everyday habits that have the greatest impact on our children's health — not only today, but for years to come.

There were moments when my younger daughter explored the world in ways that completely overwhelmed me as a mother. One day, I caught her chewing on one of our dog's toys. Needless to say, I was horrified.

But as the years went by, I learned something important. We cannot — and should not — try to create a completely sterile world for our children.

Children learn through play. They explore through touch. They get dirty, climb, run, fall, collect rocks, pet animals, and ask endless questions. Through these experiences, they learn about the world around them while building confidence, resilience, and independence.

Of course, safety should always come first. But sometimes it is important to step back and remember that children learn, grow, and build resilience through everyday experiences that cannot always be planned or controlled. They do not need perfect conditions to grow and thrive. They need love, support, healthy habits, nourishing food, quality sleep, movement, time outdoors, and the freedom to explore the world around them.

Perhaps it is within that balance between guidance and freedom that one of the greatest gifts we can give our children truly exists.



Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. I hope this guide provided helpful information, practical ideas, and encouragement along your parenting journey. If there is one message I would love for you to take away, it is that small, consistent habits can truly make a meaningful difference over time.

As a mother of two girls, I know that parenting is not always easy and that we are often doing our best while learning and growing alongside our children. So be kind to yourself, celebrate the small victories, and remember that no child needs a perfect parent — they need a childhood filled with love, support, and care.

I wish you and your family good health, happiness, and many wonderful moments together.

Warm regards,

Dragana Valuh



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