

Children's HEALTH

A ^{to} Z



*Help
your child
get better
and stay well
naturally*

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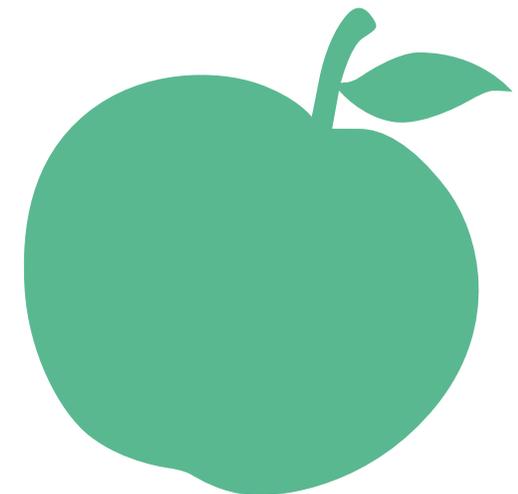
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4 Steps Toward Optimal Health for Your Child

1 Nutrition

One of the most important things you can do for your child, at any age (in other words, it is never too late to start), is to put them on the right path for optimal nutrition. The healthier the foods they eat in childhood, the more likely children are to choose equally healthy foods when they are adults. My basic principles for optimal nutrition are: Eat foods as close to their natural state as possible; eat less sugar; avoid artificial additives; less meat is better; eat organic.

Breastfeeding – the natural way to start

As mammals, we are evolved to drink the milk from our mothers – and nothing in the world comes close to this. Breast milk is produced by the mother in just the right amount and is a precise composition of magical ingredients – immune cells, hormones, growth factors and cytokines (messengers of the immune system) – for her baby to grow and develop optimally. Breast milk changes from feed to feed, depending on the time of day, the baby's age, time from last suckle, the mother's diet and what kind of germs are in the environment. It is designed to optimally nourish a baby. It is much more than food. WHO and UNICEF recommend breastfeeding exclusively (this means the baby needs nothing but breast milk) for the first 6 months and then continual breastfeeding along with weaning foods for 2 years or beyond.

Processed versus unprocessed

Make sure your children eat nutrient-dense food. The closer food is to its natural state, the more nutrients it contains. The more processed it is, the more nutrients are lost. What does this mean? 'Nutrient-dense' refers to the number of nutrients the food contains, as opposed to how many calories it supplies. So you want food that contains vitamins, minerals, essential fatty acids, fibre and phytonutrients. Phytonutrients are the properties of the plant that keep the plant healthy, and you too. A good example is resveratrol. This antioxidant protects grapes against fungal infections and in humans it has an anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer effect. Only plants have phytonutrients.

One simple rule is not to eat anything that is 'white' (unless it is naturally white – like parsnips). In processing, the outer, brown layers of the grain are

removed to make the shelf life longer, but it is precisely those outer layers that contain the nutrients, including fibre, healthy fats and vitamins. Choose brown rice over white rice, wholegrain flour over white flour, wholewheat pasta over white pasta (or try quinoa pasta – kids like it and it is even healthier because it contains more protein than wholewheat pasta). If you have a local baker, talk to them about the possibility of baking bread using ancient grains, such as spelt and amaranth, which you can be sure have not been genetically modified. They are also less hybridized, and so contain less gluten than wheat, for example. Some commercial bakers are now selling breads made from ancient grains. Check the ingredients on the label. Grains marked 'heirloom' are the very best, as they have not been tampered with in any way.

In general, eat foods your grandparents would recognize as food, such as fresh vegetables, salads, fruit, nuts, beans, other healthy sources of protein, and whole grains. Avoid packages of freeze-dried or canned convenience foods, which however convenient they may seem nonetheless contain too much sugar, salt, unhealthy hydrogenated fats and plenty of additives. For easy to prepare, wholesome meal ideas see pages 20–22.

You want your children to avoid 'empty' calories. Foods that are high in fat and refined sugar add calories but few or no nutrients. Foods that consist of 'empty' calories include most candy, doughnuts, ice-cream, sugar-sweetened cereals and most commercially-baked goods, including white bread. Also avoid foods high in fat and low in nutrients, such as takeaway burgers, pizzas and French fries. Not all snack foods are created equal. You can find healthy snacks, such as muesli bars made only from whole grains, nuts and dried fruit.

Eat less sugar

Many doctors and scientists consider sugar the new tobacco: there is evidence that it may be addictive and it is clearly not healthy. Refined sugar causes dental cavities, affects the immune system and stresses our livers and pancreas. Sugar is the cause of our huge epidemic of metabolic syndrome and diabetes. Professor Robert Lustig from the University of California at San Francisco goes so far as to recommend that sugar be treated similarly to alcohol with restricted access, as it is so toxic.



Lustig, 'Sugar: The newest and bitterest truth': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wM2W_zEp5kk

The World Health Organisation recommends consuming less than 5% of our daily calories as sugar. This translates into 6 teaspoons of sugar per day for an adult (the average adult in Western countries consumes more than 4 times that). Children fare even worse: they consume between 15

and 17 teaspoons of sugar daily – mostly from candy and soft drinks. Most soda or soft drinks are pure empty calories. A can of soda contains on average 40gm or 10 teaspoons of sugar! Even sodas that claim to be natural or organic still contain more sugar than is healthy for your child. And they are, at least in part, responsible for our current epidemic of childhood obesity. (I recommend reading the ‘Sugary Drinks and Obesity Fact Sheet’, an excellent article from The Harvard School of Public Health.)

 www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/sugary-drinks-fact-sheet/

Drinking one can of soda a day can increase the risk of type 2 diabetes by 22%, according to a study conducted by researchers from Imperial College London.

 www3.imperial.ac.uk/newsandeventspggrp/imperialcollege/newssummary/news_24-4-2013-16-31-35

Type 2 diabetes occurs when insulin-making cells begin to fail. Our pancreas produces insulin when we eat sugar and the insulin helps to transport the sugar into all our cells, where it is turned into energy. If we eat too much sugar or if we are obese, the body cannot keep up the production of insulin and some of the sugar stays in the blood, where it cannot be used and causes high blood sugar levels, i.e., diabetes. This condition used to be called adult-onset diabetes, but now that children are often obese, it is more and more commonly found among young people as well. Have your children watch this educational video (<http://www.therealbears.org/>), which uses polar bears to explain the risks of drinking sodas. Parents should watch it first, and then decide whether it might be too graphic for their children. (One of the polar bears gets his leg amputated due to diabetes – this is a rare, but unfortunately realistic outcome of type 2 diabetes.)

The solution is easy really. Avoid soft drinks altogether. (This applies to adults as well as children.) Choose plain water instead (or for flavour add a bit of freshly squeezed lemon juice). If your children have a hard time being weaned off their soft drinks, you can prepare a healthy lemonade with stevia and lemon juice.

Recipe for stevia lemonade

1 cup of water (bubbly if your child likes it)

juice of 1 lemon

a sprinkle of stevia

Stir and chill – ready to enjoy.

Remember to set a good example – if your children see you grab a cola, they will imitate you; if they see you drinking water regularly, they will follow your healthy example.

How to spot hidden sugar on food labels

Here are some of the more common names for sugar:

Fructose	Agave nectar
Sucrose	Golden syrup
Glucose	Maltodextrin
Maltose	Caramel
High fructose corn syrup	Molasses
Cane sugar	Beet sugar
Malt syrup	

But kids demand sweets... they do. We have evolved to like sweet food, but in times past in Nature that was a piece of fruit or a sweet root, rather than processed sugar or high fructose corn syrup. These extremely processed sugars are added to the many foods that are advertised to children and conveniently (or not) located at the check-out counter.

A Swedish idea, started in 1959 by the Medical Board to reduce the risk of cavities and still continuing, recommends giving candy to children only one day a week (generally Saturday). This is called ‘lördagsgodis’, literally ‘Saturday candy’. This was followed by thorough teeth brushing. Dentists in Sweden don’t have much work since this concept was introduced, as children no longer develop as many cavities.

Sugar is not only bad for your teeth, it also suppresses the immune system, increases the risk of diabetes and of becoming overweight and changes your gut flora, the right balance of which is vital for good health.

Stevia is a healthy alternative to sugar and can be used in baking and cooking. It is 200 times sweeter than sugar by weight, so you only need tiny amounts. It is made from the leaves of a plant grown in Brazil and Paraguay, *Stevia rebaudiana*. It does not have any calories and does not affect the gut bacteria (so does not increase the growth of candida or yeast in the gut), nor does it raise the blood sugar level, so does not have the negative effect on insulin that regular sugar has. Stevia is considered safe if consumed in small amounts.

How can you replace sugar?

Here is a list of healthier natural sweeteners:

Stevia is best, but the taste takes getting used to. Maple syrup, manuka honey, coconut sugar, date sugar are still sugars, but preferable to white sugar, as they are whole foods, which contain some minerals and vitamins.

Use these sparingly.

The more sugar your child eats, the more unstable their blood sugar levels will be. That is why it is important to eat a diet of foods low on the glycaemic index. The glycaemic index is a measure of how quickly a food raises your blood sugar level. Pure sugar has a high index; so does white bread. These foods will raise your child's blood sugar level very quickly, which in turn will increase the production of insulin, the hormone that pushes sugar from the blood to the cells. The blood sugar level then drops very quickly which leads to a surge in stress hormones. Like a roller-coaster, every high is followed by a dip. Your child then gets hungry and irritable, and craves another sugar hit.

This zig-zag of an up and down blood sugar level is unhealthy: it makes your child constantly hungry, stressed, and depletes insulin because the insulin-producing cells cannot keep up production (which can lead to Type 2 diabetes). The process drains your child's energy and affects his or her focus and attention. You can look up the position of a wide range of foods on the glycaemic index here:



www.glycemicindex.com

This website will also give you a value for the glycaemic load, which takes into account the amount of carbohydrates/sugars in a food per serving. So, for example, watermelon and carrots have a high glycaemic index (71–72), as the sugar in them is released very quickly into the blood stream. But the amount of sugar per serving is small, as both consist mostly of water. So the glycaemic load is low (only 6–7), as the overall effect on blood sugar is small when one serving of these foods is consumed. Other foods that have a high glycaemic index, such as sugar, also have a high glycaemic load, as there is nothing else but sugar in one serving, with no water or fibre to dilute the effect.

A low glycaemic diet consists of foods that raise your blood sugar level slowly and keep it steady, avoiding the roller-coaster effect and giving you more of a gentle wave pattern of blood sugar levels. With a low glycaemic diet, your child will stay satiated for longer, have more energy, better attention

and general good health. Studies have shown that children who eat a low glycaemic-load at breakfast work better at school.⁽⁴⁾

The foods with the lowest glycaemic load are vegetables, healthy proteins, and whole grains. The highest load comes from processed sweet foods such as soft drinks and candy, and processed grains such as white rice, white flour and white potato (especially instant mashed potato).

Avoid artificial food additives

You need to be careful in choosing healthy foods and snacks. Rather than relying on the advertisement on the package, learn to read the labels critically. The label will show you how much sugar and additives, such as colouring, the food contains. The mere fact that it says 'healthy' or 'natural' does not mean it is good for you – in fact, the use of these words is not regulated. You will learn more from reading the label carefully.



Watch this excellent video by Dr Novick on how to read labels:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtxvIHRkoAg

As a rule of thumb, the less processed the food, the better (i.e., it is healthier to eat an apple, than a defrosted pop tart with apple sauce). Processed foods often contain a long list of additives, including artificial colours, preservatives and non-natural flavours. These are not added for our health benefit, but only because they make the foods more attractive (children are drawn to bright colours), more durable (so they can be stored for years), and tastier, even if they are devoid of nutrients.

Many children react to these additives with hyperactive behaviour or allergic reactions. They are certainly not healthy and are best avoided. If you buy any packaged foods, you will need to train yourself to read labels. It can take a while, but is worth the effort. Even my husband, who does not have a great eye for detail, has learnt to spot the dreaded 102 colouring or 621 MSG (monosodium glutamate) and knows to take a wide berth around any foods that contain these.

The same principle applies to drinks: the most natural, in other words least processed, drink will always be plain water and this should be your first choice. Fresh homemade fruit or vegetable juices, even though they are naturally sweet, are not unhealthy. Nonetheless, I still prefer that children eat the whole fruit or vegetable in order to get fibre. Store-bought juices, on the other hand, are potential minefields: even if they do not have added sugar, they are still high in fructose and contribute to dental cavities (from the sugar) and obesity (as they are high in calories but not very filling).

Nasty additives in food – numbers to avoid

The following 3-digit numbers are unique international identification numbers for food additives. In Europe they are preceded by an ‘E’ which stands for Europe. If you want to read more about each additive, I recommend buying *The Chemical Maze*, available as a book and an app.

COLOURS

Artificial

102	tartrazine	128	red 2G
104	quinoline yellow	129	allura red
107	yellow 2G	132	indigotine, indigo carmine
110	sunset yellow	133	brilliant blue
122	azorubine, carmoisine	142	green S, food green, acid brilliant green
123	amaranth	151	brilliant black
124	ponceau, brilliant scarlet	155	brown, chocolate brown
127	erythrosine		

COLOURS

Natural

160b annatto, bixin, norbixin (no safer than the artificial colours)

PRESERVATIVES

200-203	sorbic acid, potassium & calcium sorbates
210-213	benzoic acid, sodium, potassium & calcium benzoates
220-228	sulphur dioxide, all sulphites, bisulphites, metabisulphites
249-252	all nitrates & nitrites
280-283	propionic acid, sodium, potassium & calcium propionates

ANTIOXIDANTS

310-312	all gallates
319-321	TBHQ, BHA butylated hydroxyanisole, BHT butylated hydroxytoluene

FLAVOUR ENHANCERS

620-625	glutamic acid and all glutamates, MSG monosodium glutamate
627	disodium guanylate
631	disodium inosinate
635	ribonucleotides
Yeast extract, HVP and HPP (hydrolysed vegetable or plant protein)	

FLAVOURS

Unregulated. Even ‘natural flavours’ does not mean it is safe.

ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS

951	aspartame (Nutrasweet®, Equal®)
954	Saccharin (sweet’N Low®)
955	sucralose (Splenda®)

How to encourage your child to drink more water

- Add fresh lemon to the water
- Put bubbles in the water with a product such as Sodastream®
- Encourage your child to drink 1 glass of water before school, a 1 L water bottle at school, 1 glass after school and 1 glass at least 20 minutes before dinner
- Ask the teacher to allow water bottles on the desk or free access to a water fountain

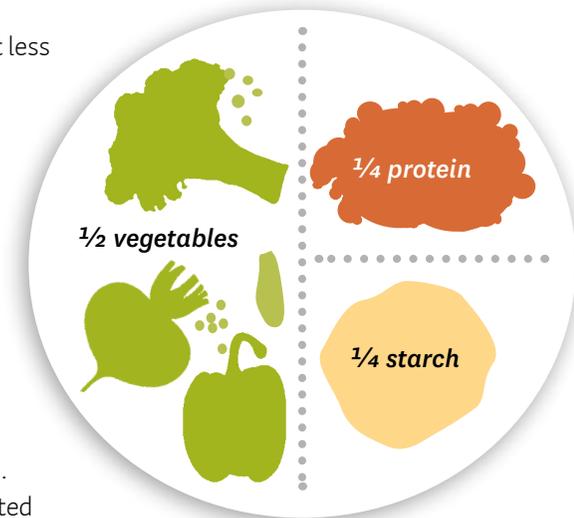
Less meat is better

Many parents are surprised when I tell them to feed their children less meat. Yet it is now clear that almost everyone eats too much meat, and virtually all nutrition experts agree that it is better to eat less, because meat increases your risk of many diseases. In addition, you ingest antibiotics routinely fed to the animals to make them grow faster. (Not to mention the burden of animal farming on our environment. The global livestock industry produces more greenhouse gases than all transport emissions put together.)

One way to introduce the idea of eating less meat to the family is to have ‘Meatless Mondays’. Or you could try ‘Vegan before 6’, where the family eats plant-based meals for breakfast and lunch and then anything they like for dinner. Another trend is to reduce the amount of meat on your plate: it should not cover more than a quarter of your plate, with half of the plate consisting of vegetables and the remaining quarter with grains or starchy vegetables, such as sweet potato.

Another reason it is healthier to eat less meat is that toxins, such as pesticides, accumulate in fat. So the higher the fat content of a food, the higher the concentration of pesticides, for example, and they increase as you go up the food chain. Dairy, fish and meat contain much more fat than most vegetables and fruit, so they are more contaminated.

Fish is high in Omega 3 fatty acids, which are important for the brain. Unfortunately most fish are contaminated



with mercury, one of the most toxic substances known. In the ocean small fish are eaten by larger fish and as you go up the food chain the content of mercury, PCBs (Polychlorinated biphenyls – highly toxic chemicals) and other toxins, in the fish increases. So choose fish with the lowest mercury content possible, that is small-size fish, including sardines, herring and mullet.



A useful reference is the wallet card of mercury content in fish at <http://www.ewg.org/research/ewgs-good-seafood-guide>

Apart from the toxins fed to animals raised for meat, including pesticides and antibiotics, there are some additional nasty chemicals used to cure meats. Therefore you certainly want to avoid any kind of treated meat (including smoked, cured, preserved or dried meats) such as sausages, bacon, hot dogs, baloney, salami, delicatessen meats in general, and what are sometimes called luncheon meats. These contain nitrites and increase your child's risk of developing colon cancer later in life.

Remember, plants are the most nutritious foods you can serve your family, as they contain healthy fats, lots of fibre and health-promoting antioxidants, minerals and vitamins, and the more you eat of them the better – so make sure your children get plenty of vegetables, nuts, grains, pulses and fruit.

Organic is best

One general rule about food of any kind (fruits and vegetables, grains, and even more important for meat, fish, dairy and eggs) is if you can possibly find it organic, choose that over conventionally grown. Farmers' markets are usually a good source of fresh, organic produce. (Make sure it is certified organic or at least spray-free.) If you are lucky enough to have an outdoor market nearby, make a habit of going once a week, and take your children along with you. They will learn to enjoy choosing yummy foods and it's a good way to support local growers and farmers.

The advantages of organic food over non-organic include the absence of pesticides (obviously) and possibly higher nutrient levels. Government-funded (as opposed to pesticide industry-funded) studies have shown that organic food contains higher amounts of vitamins and minerals.⁽²⁾

Pesticides are neurotoxins – this means they are a poison for the brain. For example, organophosphate pesticides, which are sprayed on corn, wheat, fruit and vegetables to kill insects, interfere with the normal growth and development of brain cells and disrupt the neurotransmitter acetylcholine, which is essential for spreading messages from one brain cell to the next. Unborn babies and young children are especially vulnerable to these toxic

effects, as their brains are developing at an incredible speed from just a few cells to the most complex structure known in the universe. Children are also less able to eliminate toxins, as their detoxification pathways, including in the liver and kidneys, are not mature.

Pesticides can also act as hormone disruptors, that is they interfere with normal hormone function. For example, they can affect the production of thyroid hormone, which is essential for optimal growth, learning and development. They can also affect sex hormones and are thought to be responsible for the significant reduction in sperm counts in animals and humans.

In one study children with the highest pesticide levels in their body (measured in their urine) had the highest risk of having a diagnosis of ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).⁽³⁾

Another interesting study showed that the closer a woman lived to a field sprayed with organophosphate pesticides, the higher the risk that her child would develop autism.⁽⁴⁾

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) (www.ewg.org) has published the Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce™, which lists the fruits and vegetables with the highest concentration of pesticides, that we should always avoid unless they are organically grown. Apples top the list. It is relatively easy to avoid buying pesticide-laden apples as most supermarkets sell organic apples and they are not much more expensive than the conventionally-grown ones. EWG also has a list of the 'Clean Fifteen': avocados are the top contenders – which means they are quite safe to eat even if not organically grown, because the flesh is protected by a thick peel. In general the thicker the peel, the less pesticides pass into the fruit or vegetable.



List of Dirty Dozen Plus and Clean Fifteen: www.ewg.org/foodnews/

You can, of course, also grow some of your own organic vegetables in your garden or in containers. Green leafy vegetables, such as lettuce, chard, kale, and spinach are very easy and quick to grow and children love to pick and help you prepare them. Nothing tastes better than freshly picked fruits and vegetables.

So remember that if you have a choice buy organic produce to reduce your children's exposure to potentially dangerous toxins, and to provide them with more nutritious and tastier food. Have a look at the simple, healthy meal, snack and school lunch ideas on the following pages. You do not have to be a master chef to produce a healthy, tasty meal.

Meal ideas

Breakfast

- Porridge made from oats, brown rice, quinoa or millet mixed with nuts and seeds, topped with fresh fruit
- Muesli made from whole grains, nuts and seeds with soy, coconut or rice milk and fresh fruit
- Eggs: omelettes with plenty of vegetables; fried or boiled eggs
- Scrambled tofu or egg with diced carrots, red pepper, broccoli, avocado
- Wholegrain flour (or even better use almond, buckwheat or coconut flour) muffins with grated carrot and zucchini - add any other vegetables your child will eat
- Buckwheat pancakes or waffles (optional: grate carrot, zucchini or other vegetables into the batter).

Lunch

- Sushi made with brown rice or sliced vegetables and tofu rolled up in a nori sheet
- Rice salad: mix brown rice with grated vegetables, nuts and seeds and a dressing of olive oil, lemon and salt
- Corn and pea (or any other vegetables) fritters in buckwheat batter - served with a dipping sauce, such as tahini or sweet chili
- Wholegrain sandwiches with salad, a protein pattie (meat, tofu, lentil or nut burger)
- Fried brown rice with vegetables and meat or tofu
- Salad: coleslaw made with tahini sauce
- Vietnamese rice wraps: soften rice paper in warm water and fill with your choice of sliced carrots, cucumber, avocado, bean sprouts, rice vermicelli, mushrooms, tofu, coriander, salad leaves. Dip into soy, tahini or sweet chili sauce.

Dinner

- Chili with lots of beans and vegetables
- Brown rice, vegetables and meat/vegetarian protein (beans, lentils, tofu or tempeh)

- Coconut curry: vegetables and protein cooked in coconut cream with spices such as lemongrass, Thai basil or chili
- Indian curry served with brown rice and a protein: for example, dhal (lentils); spinach/kale blended with Indian spices; mixed vegetables in coconut cream with curry spices
- Taco shells filled with brown rice, shredded lettuce, guacamole, salsa, beans (meat optional)
- Soup: add any vegetables and legumes you have in the house to a soup stock, add plenty of herbs for extra antioxidants. In the summer you can make a gazpacho (chilled tomato soup): just mix tomatoes, cucumber, peppers, lemon, salt or soy sauce in a blender. Add herbs to taste
- Polenta: cornmeal layered with vegetables and meat/tofu or legumes
- Nachos: corn chips topped with guacamole (mashed avocado with lemon juice, salt and garlic), tomato salsa (chopped tomatoes, chopped onions, coriander, lemon juice, salt), refried, black or pinto beans.

Smoothie recipe

Smoothies are a great way to get vegetables packed with vitamins and minerals into your child. I recommend starting with mostly fruit and slowly increasing the greens to get your child used to the taste. Be creative – just add any fruits and vegetables you have in the fridge and experiment.

A good starter:

- 1 cup of coconut water
- 1 cup of water
- ½ cup of ice
- 1 banana, frozen or fresh
- ½ cup berries (preferable organic)
- 2–3cm slice of fresh pineapple

1 cup of either kale, spinach or romaine lettuce

Blend until smooth and enjoy.

Advanced smoothie:

Add in a small amount of fresh ginger or turmeric root and ½ an orange, lemon or lime (peeled). Options for additional variety: ½ cup coconut cream or ½ avocado.



Snacks

- Hummus and carrot/cucumber/celery/pepper sticks
- Whole grain muffins with vegetables grated into the batter
- Nuts and seeds
- Smoothies: coconut, almond, soy or rice milk with berries, banana, nuts, seeds (chia, sesame)
- Roasted nori sheets: great source of iodine. Take a sheet of nori, rub a little oil on both sides, then take it through a gas flame a few times until it is crunchy. Add salt and cut into bite-size pieces
- Homemade popcorn
- Nut butter balls rolled in sesame seeds
- Chia pudding: soak chia seeds in water, add coconut cream and stewed fruit. Stir and enjoy.

What to drink

- Clean water – you can add lemon juice
- Herbal teas (chamomile, mint, rosehip)
- As a treat, lemonade made from water, squeezed lemons and stevia.

For more ideas try:



www.superhealthykids.com/healthy-kids-recipes

www.vegkitchen.com/kid-friendly-recipes

Three steps to healthy nutrition

If all this seems daunting, remember to:

1. Cook food your grandmother would recognize: fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains and a lean protein. Drink mainly water.
2. The ideal ratio is half a plate of vegetables, a quarter unprocessed grains (such as brown rice) and a quarter protein.
3. Have meals together as a family. Children who get separate meals often get inferior nutrition, and mealtimes are a great time to socialise and to set a good example in eating healthy foods. Don't miss the opportunity!

2 Sleep

How much?

How many hours do children need to sleep? Although it depends on the age of the child, one general answer is now clear: more than you think! Sleep loss affects everyone, but the impact is far greater on children who are still growing. This is an area where you cannot be creative or believe your child is an exception. Believe me, he or she needs just as much sleep as every other child. And that is a lot!

All children need to sleep more than an adult. Adults require between seven and nine hours of sleep every night. If they don't get this amount, they are building up a 'sleep debt'. This is not a metaphor: if you have a debt you have to repay it in sleep. So if you miss two hours sleep one night, you need to sleep two hours more the next night.

We know this intuitively with babies: nobody expects a newborn, or a baby of under a year old to miss sleep. Before they are 1 year old they sleep for 14 to 18 hours a day, no matter what happens. And until they are 3 years old, they will need, and usually get, between 12 and 14 hours of sleep every night. Only when they are between 3 and 6 years old can they manage with 11 to 12 hours of sleep a night. Until they are 12, they still need 10 or 11 hours of sleep, and from 12 to 18 years, they can manage with between 8 and 10 hours of sleep; still just a bit more than an adult.

How much sleep does your child need?

Birth–12 months old:	14–18 hours per day
1–3 years old:	12–14 hours per day
3–6 years old:	11–12 hours per day
7–12 years old:	10–11 hours per day
12–18 years old:	8–10 hours per day

It is true that every child differs, but don't let anyone tell you that their child manages well with much less sleep. There are magic numbers when it comes to sleep, and you have just read them. Keep them in mind, for they are essential to your child's overall health and well-being.

If this information surprises you, and your child is getting less sleep than these amounts, then you need to make changes, because the lack of sleep in children (or adults for that matter) is not a trifling matter: it affects their ability to learn and their immune system – indeed, their health in general.

Brain power through sleep

Sleep is not just rest. During sleep, the brain is doing a great deal of important work that it cannot do when we are awake. In fact, new research suggests that chronic sleep deprivation can lead to an increased susceptibility to dementia and other forms of cognitive decline. Important clean-up work takes place during sleep. You may notice, for example, that your children remember and learn more easily when they are well rested. Being tired precludes good school habits. During psychological testing, it is often noted that the longer the child slept before the test, the higher the IQ.

Another important fact is that children have had enough sleep if they wake on their own and are rested and happy. If you have to wake them to get them ready for kindy or school, or they wake up grumpy and tired, they have not had enough sleep. Bring their bedtime forward to allow them enough sleep. The exception to this is teenagers. When children become teenagers, their sleep cycles change and make them want to go to bed late and get up even later – few of them will be happy in the morning! But they still need to get 8 to 10 hours every night.

It is not just the amount, but the quality of sleep that matters as well. Falling asleep out of exhaustion in a chair or in the back of a car is not the same as sleeping in a comfortable bed in a well-aired, quiet room. Naturally a comfortable mattress (I recommend organic latex, wool or cotton mattresses) makes a difference, as does a comfortable pillow. (Avoid a pillow stuffed with artificial materials.)

Remember: Your child needs enough sleep to feel rested when they wake and have plenty of energy to be active and playful.



How to prepare for a good night's sleep

The more exercise a child has during the day – especially in green outdoor spaces (see chapter 3) – the better he or she will sleep at night. Melatonin, the sleep hormone, is produced in the dark, but only if you have had exposure to natural, outdoor light during the day.

We are evolved to be awake when the sun is up and to go to sleep when it gets dark. With daylight saving it stays light until late, keeping children up later at night, so consider getting blackout blinds or curtains to use during the summer months.

A calm and predictable bedtime routine can help children settle to sleep. Find what works for you and don't wait until your child is overtired and crying before beginning the routine. Start early. If you rush, the stress hormones will increase and your child will become more alert rather than quieter.

It is natural to let your baby fall asleep while breastfeeding – breast milk contains calming ingredients, such as endorphins, melatonin and sleep-inducing nucleotides (the building blocks of DNA) that make your baby sleepy. The fat content of milk is highest at night and at the end of a feed, in order to keep the baby satisfied and full for longer and allow for a restful sleep. Some babies prefer to be carried in a sling or front pack to go to sleep (even while breastfeeding). This is perfectly natural. Remember that as hunter-gatherers this is what we did: we walked at a pace of about 4–5 km per hour, carrying our children until they could walk on their own and keep up.

A good bedtime routine for a younger child may look like this: dinner, bath or shower, into pyjamas, brushing teeth, story time, lullabies, hugs and off to sleep.

For older children, let's say a 12-year-old, the routine would include stopping access to all screens (computer, TV, tablets, phones) from about 6 pm, then having dinner, a shower, brushing teeth, reading in bed, and off to a restful sleep.

Some children love having a parent or sibling lie down with them or sit by their bed while they fall asleep. I don't have a problem with this. After all, we evolved as a social species and used to sleep together, first in trees, then in caves, protecting each other from wild beasts.

Switch off any screens at least 2 hours before bedtime

Melatonin is the hormone we produce in our brain when it gets dark, and it makes us sleepy. Any bright light, and in particular the blue light emitted by digital screens, such as computers, mobile phones, tablets and TVs, interferes with the production of melatonin. If your child struggles to go to sleep, dim all artificial lights or turn them off at sunset or about 2 hours before bedtime. You could even light some candles instead – they emit a gentle orange light, which does not interfere with melatonin production. Another trick is to download f.lux to your computer, which will turn the blue light off after sunset and change the background to orange light, similar to candle light. Your child will sleep best in total darkness – use curtains or blinds to ensure that no light enters the bedroom. A nightlight is OK to use for nervous children, but it should be very dim and not illuminate the entire room.

What about co-sleeping?

In many cultures children share a bed with their parents for the first few years. Even in our society, many children come to the parents' bed for part of the night or even the entire night. If you are happy to have your child or children in your bed and you all sleep well, this is fine.

For young babies I recommend a basket inside the parents' bed or a cot that can be attached to the side of the bed. You should never have a baby in your bed if you smoke or have smoked during pregnancy, had alcohol, drugs, or medicines that can affect your level of awareness or if you are obese or overtired. If none of these apply to you and you have a firm mattress and no

pillows and nothing that can suffocate a baby, such as a duvet – it is safe to have your baby in your bed from 3 months of age. In order to reduce the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), always put your baby to sleep on his or her back.

I do not recommend letting babies cry themselves to sleep – the research is clearly on the side of 'caring parenting', rather than the 'controlled crying' approach. Children who are sleep-trained with the latter method, tend to be less well-attached, less confident and more anxious later in life.

Teenagers and sleep

When children become teenagers their circadian rhythm or inner biological clock changes in a way that is not compatible with their school routine. Teenagers would like to stay up late and get up even later. Part of the grumpiness of the teen years is the lack of sleep and the disrupted sleep cycle as they get up for their 8am or 9am school start.

In addition, teenagers tend to hang out with friends (or their computers) on weekends and go to bed even later – missing a few hours on Friday and Saturday nights, which they will have to make up for with extra sleep during the rest of the week. Do let them sleep in on the weekends and encourage them to go to bed earlier after a late night. In some progressive areas around the world, high school starting times have been changed to 10am to accommodate teenagers' sleep needs.

Remember that sleep deprivation is a torture method. Do not torture your children! Let them have enough good quality sleep to allow them to thrive and they will reward you with better behaviour and better health.

A calming bedtime routine

The first step to getting your child to sleep well is to establish a predictable and soothing bedtime routine. Here is a possible scenario (which you can adjust to your own life and liking).

- Dinner without dessert (sugar and sweets can hype up a child) by natural light or candlelight (electric light interferes with melatonin production)
- Follow this with a cup of warm chamomile tea
- A warm bath with a few drops of lavender essential oil and a cup of Epsom salts (magnesium sulphate – the magnesium gets absorbed through the skin and helps your child to relax)

- A brief gentle massage with coconut, almond or jojoba oil mixed with a calming essential oil (lavender or chamomile): five minutes of gently rubbing the feet – especially the inside edge; or of gentle long strokes of the back; or a head massage
- 10–15 minutes of reading in bed: best are repetitive (i.e., hypnotic) rhymes; avoid anything scary or too exciting. Ideally this is done with a dimmed light.
- Cuddles and a song. If your child suffers from separation anxiety, you may want to sit at the bedside or lie down with your child until he or she is almost asleep.

Three things you can do during the day to improve your child's sleep at night

- 1 At least 1 hour of exercise outdoors – a trip to the park, a game of hide and seek in the garden or a soccer game at the beach.
- 2 Turn off all screens 2 hours before bedtime.
- 3 Give a cup of calming chamomile tea in the evening. Do not give any caffeinated drinks after 12 pm, such as cola (never ever), coffee, caffeinated teas or chocolate (this also contains caffeine). Breastfeeding mothers should avoid these as well because it can take many hours for their infants to break down caffeine they get through breast milk. Even just a few pieces of chocolate can affect their sleep.



For more reading on sleep:

Three in a Bed: The Benefits of Sleeping with Your Baby by Deborah Jackson (Bloomsbury, 2003)

Sleeping Like a Baby by Pinky McKay (Penguin, 2006)

Sweet Sleep by La Leche League International et al (Ballantine Books, 2014)

3 Healthy lifestyle

Children need the outdoors as much as they need anything else. They need sunshine, wind in their hair, dirt under their bare feet, water to play in or swim in and trees to climb. We may have devised ways to stay inside, but we evolved to spend most of our time outdoors: moving, walking, gathering, hunting. Our ancestors did not suffer from ‘nature deficit disorder’, a newly coined term for a problem which affects millions of our contemporary children, who spend too much time indoors and too little time in nature.



Last Child in the Woods, by Richard Louv (Atlantic Books, 2010).

All children should spend a good part of every day playing outdoors by themselves, or with other children and siblings, even if it is raining. Running, jumping and play using playgrounds are good for overall coordination; even handwriting improves with outdoor play.

The problem with screens

Children nowadays have less access to the outdoors compared to previous generations. They may live in city apartments or houses with small (or no) gardens, or their parents may fear for their safety, not allowing them unsupervised outdoor play time, or even to cycle to school. With urbanization, the outdoors has also become more built-up, less green and less attractive to kids. Unfortunately, screen time has replaced a lot of the outdoor play. Children are spending far too much time on computers and watching TV – leading to problems ranging from obesity to ADHD. Children and young people are becoming addicted to screens, and screens are becoming increasingly easier to access, especially through portable devices. It is not uncommon to see children and teenagers sitting together, but not talking to each other – instead they are busy texting, posting messages on Facebook or Snapchatting pictures. They are losing direct human connection and replacing it with a digital version. Occupational therapists and paediatricians have even called for a ban of handheld devices for children under 12 years of age!



www.huffingtonpost.com/cris-rowan/10-reasons-why-handheld-devices-should-be-banned_b_4899218.html

Urban planners are busy beautifying and greening our cities to get children and adults to enjoy the outdoors once again. But to get children outside, you will have to get them off their screens.

What this means is that screen time, whether it be TV or a smart phone, or the computer or an iPad, must be restricted. How much? Prepare to be shocked: for children under 3 years, no screen time at all! For children between 3 and 5, they should be allowed no more than 1 hour of screen time and older children and teenagers should be restricted to 2 hours at home when they are not doing school work. (Even adults should probably have no more than 2 hours of screen time a day; impossible as that sounds in today's world.) I know this sounds harsh (is she insane?), especially since the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) estimates that the average child spends 7 hours of their day looking at a screen.⁽¹⁾

Why would I recommend cutting it down so drastically? Because everyone who does research on this topic recognizes the importance of outdoor time as opposed to screen time for optimal development and health. I have not always been able to impose these limits on my own two boys, so I know how difficult it is, but you must try, and keep trying.

Why? Because screen time of any kind, even educational games, changes the brain.⁽²⁾ The evidence is conclusive: As surely as any other addiction, screen time creates real and visible changes in brain chemistry – most notably in the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter responsible for our feeling pleasure, and the kind of pleasure that is difficult to deny (think of drug addictions).

Perhaps that is why the new version of the DSM (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) lists compulsive internet use as a disorder that needs further study. True, some people believe that psychiatrists like to turn everyday activities into an illness, but in this case I think the psychiatrists have a point.

Everything that is true for screens in general applies even more so to violent games and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under 12 do not play them at all, and limits them to 30 minutes per day for older children. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, in a review of the literature, says that violent programming can cause kids to become immune to the horror of violence, or slowly come to accept violence as a way to solve problems and possibly even identify with the aggressor.⁽³⁾

Switch off all screens 2 hours before bedtime to allow optimal production of melatonin, our sleep hormone.

What children need is not to sit passively in front of a screen, or be subjected to images that literally shock their brain (and produce a fight or flight reaction that then has to be ignored) but to be part of the physical world: they need social interaction; they need to learn motor skills; they need to use their hands to manipulate objects in the real world.

When you ask your child to leave their screen after their time is up, they often refuse, but also when they do stop, they are often in a bad mood because their brains are in 'digital mode' and take time to switch back to being sociable. You have interfered with the immediate feedback pleasure loop that is specifically designed to create an addiction. Remember that the people who make video and computer games and TV programmes are not interested in your child's health. They want your child to develop a habit for life. And that is indeed just what happens. You can be sure that a child who spends 6 or 7 hours a day on a screen is not going to give that up as an adult, but will only increase the time. Too much screen time is akin to too much junk food – it is not just empty calories, but harmful calories.

The more time a child spends outside, the less likely they are to develop ADHD type behaviours.⁽⁴⁾ That, too, is just common sense. How often do children in a classroom feel legitimate boredom because their natural inclination to be active and outdoors is interfered with? Sometimes we label children as having a disorder when all they need is recess: they need to get out of an enclosed space and into the sun. Researchers have shown that exposure to green spaces may help treat ADHD⁽⁵⁾ and that children concentrate better after a walk in the park.⁽⁶⁾

Some of the more progressive primary schools are giving children a 15-minute break for outdoor play and running in the fields after every 20–30 minutes of academic work. They find that the children learn faster, behave better and are happier than if they are kept indoors for longer periods.

What are the other risks of too much screen time? Type 2 Diabetes – it stands to reason. If children are just sitting all the time, their BMI (body mass index) is going to increase as is their potential to get fatter, and eventually become obese – the main risk-factor for Type 2 Diabetes. It is for good reason that sitting is considered the new smoking. Even cardiovascular disease is

related to increased screen time for children because of inactivity and not exercising their muscles, including the heart muscle. Children also sleep better when they have been outside, and you already know that sufficient sleep is one of the pillars of good health.

So, all in all, my recommendations are:

- Get your children off their screens and into nature
- Set a good example by taking your children on hikes and to parks on the weekend
- Model NOT going on a screen after dinner, but instead spend some time as a family, going for a walk around the block, talking, reading or playing a game
- Create a screen-free zone in your house; do not allow screens in bedrooms and collect all portable devices in the evening in a 'charging dock' where they spend the night, to allow the humans in the house to get a restful sleep

The importance of sunshine

All children need vitamin D for growth, happiness and their immune system. That is why we see growth spurts in the summer: because children are getting sufficient vitamin D from the sun. Both vitamin D and physical activity increase the growth hormone.

We all know about the importance of vitamin D for strong bones – it is in fact at least as important as eating enough calcium. But vitamin D has many other functions besides strengthening our skeletons. Have you heard of SAD – seasonal affective disorder? This is the scientific term for the 'winter blues': people become depressed or sad when their vitamin D levels drop in the winter. Vitamin D is also vital for optimal immune function: the lower the vitamin D level, the higher the chance of having asthma exacerbations (attacks), eczema and infections, like the flu. This is why we have so many more viruses in the winter: vitamin D levels drop in the cold season, as the sun is at an angle at which it is not strong enough to produce the substance in our skin.

Vitamin D deficiency has also been associated with an increased risk of auto-immune diseases, including arthritis, diabetes and multiple sclerosis.

Think about it: we evolved to live like the Masai – outdoors, near the equator, scantily dressed – but our current lifestyles are the opposite in that we

live far from the equator, spend most of our time indoors and cover ourselves when we do go outside to avoid the cold (or in the summer, the sun). That is why many children are vitamin D deficient in the winter. The Harvard School of Public Health speaks of 'Vitamin D Deficiency: A Global Concern'. The school points out that worldwide an estimated 1 billion people have inadequate levels of vitamin D in their blood. I cannot recommend more highly their online article on this topic.



www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/vitamin-d

In many parts of the world, particularly Australia and New Zealand, where the UV radiation from the sun is particularly strong, we need to protect our children (and ourselves) from the risk of sunburn. Too much sun is not a good thing – it increases the risk of skin cancer. So in these areas parents have to maintain a fine balance between covering their children with long sleeves, sunscreens and hats and still allowing them some time in the sun to produce vitamin D. I recommend getting a UV (ultraviolet light) meter to measure the UV radiation for yourself (or check UV levels given on weather forecasts). Avoid the sun when the radiation is very high and allow time in the sun when it is low, generally in the early morning and late afternoon.

Even in summer, the amount of vitamin D that most children get is sub-optimal, although in high latitudes (regions far away from the equator) long days, and long sunlight, generally provide adequate amounts – as long as the children spend plenty of time outdoors. In Northern European countries like Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway, where from September through March, there is simply not enough UV light to provide vitamin D from sun exposure, governments routinely advise giving vitamin D supplementation to children, as it has been shown to improve their health.

Your children will be healthier and happier if they are allowed to live a bit more like the Masai!

4 Avoiding environmental toxins

We live in a toxic world. There are dangerous chemicals in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat and the products we clean our houses and ourselves with. Babies are born ‘pre-polluted’, with hundreds of toxic chemicals in their blood. These have been measured before the baby even takes her first breath.

There is plenty of research that shows a correlation between exposure to these toxins and problems with health and development. For example, the closer a pregnant mother lives to a field that is sprayed with pesticides, or to freeways, the higher the risk that her child may develop ADHD or autism.^(1,2)

So what can we do to protect our children from these toxic chemicals that are all around us? You may not be able to move your family to a toxin-free country and you cannot improve the outdoor air quality in your city on your own. But don’t despair – you do have control over what chemicals you bring into your home, and there is quite a bit you can do to reduce your child’s exposure to toxins.

The air that you breathe

Smoking

Indoor air pollution is often worse than outdoor air. Why is that? Smoking is, of course, a terrible way of polluting your house and making your children and yourselves sick. Luckily, more and more people are quitting this unhealthy habit.

It is not enough to avoid second-hand smoke by smoking outdoors or changing your clothes after you have smoked – even breathing in the same room as your child, hours after you had a cigarette, still exposes her to the more than 2000 toxic chemicals in cigarettes. This is called ‘third-hand smoking’ and is almost as bad as second-hand smoke. There is no way around it, if you are a smoker, you need to quit. If you have friends who are smokers and you care for their health or their children’s, take them to a ‘quit smoking’

meeting or give them a voucher for a hypnotherapy session for their next birthday. If a person quits before they turn 40, they will not lose the 10 years of life they would otherwise.

Open fires

Another common way of exposing children to small particles that affect their lungs are open fires. Most countries no longer allow open fireplaces to be built in new houses, as they produce so much air pollution and cause an increase in breathing problems, such as asthma and lung infections in children.

Dust mites and mould

And then there are dust mites and mould – my least favourite housemates – both very unhealthy and associated with allergies and other health problems.

Mould grows in damp and poorly ventilated houses and it is highly toxic. There are many different kinds of moulds with different kinds and levels of toxicity, but only very few moulds that are healthy (one example is the antibiotic penicillin, which is produced by mould). About one quarter of us cannot mount an appropriate immune response to mould and instead develop severe inflammation – causing all kinds of health problems, from annoying coughs to debilitating chronic fatigue. (See more about mould removal on page 66.)

Dust mites are everywhere, especially in mattresses, bedding, carpets and stuffed animals. Many children are allergic to dust mites and don’t sleep well as they are surrounded by them all night long. If you saw a carpet under a microscope, you would want to incinerate it immediately: they are filled with millions of mites and other unpleasant beings.

Cleaning products can be toxic

Most people try to keep their houses as clean as possible yet many well-meaning people are poisoning themselves with the cleaning products they are using.

Whatever you use to clean your house, you will find traces of the products in your food. There are many alternatives to these contaminating substances. For example, microfibre cloths and water are excellent for removing most dirt and you can just wash them in the washing machine afterwards.

If you want to use something more than water, you can make your own cleaners with baking soda and white vinegar or get eco-friendly products. (Read the ingredients on the label to make sure they truly are non-toxic.)

My recommendations for a healthy house are:

- 1 Ventilate your house well – open the windows during the day if it is not too cold or too hot. Keep the moisture at about 50% (use a moisture meter to measure humidity in your home) because at this level mould does not grow easily and dust mites don't reproduce as well. You may have to use a dehumidifier to get it down to 50%. In very polluted cities (think Beijing), use a room air purifier to suck the dust and soot particles out of the air.
- 2 Vacuum frequently with a HEPA filter (a very fine filter that catches even the smallest particles such as dust mites) as otherwise the dust mites and mould are sucked in at the front and blown out at the back of the vacuum and redistributed all over your house.
- 3 Get rid of your chemical cleaners and exchange them for non-toxic ones.
- 4 When you build or renovate, think of some basic points.
 - Wooden floors are easier to clean than carpet and healthier as they do not harbour dust mites.
 - MDF (medium-density fibreboard), pressed wood and particle boards contain toxic glues and formaldehyde – both lung irritants and carcinogens – and you can get healthier alternatives such as ECOboards or plywood.
 - Do not remove old lead paint yourself – it is highly toxic and needs to be stripped by professionals with proper equipment.
 - Choose low VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints for your walls, decks, etc.
 - Do not use arsenic-treated decking wood, as your children will absorb the arsenic through their skin when crawling or walking on the deck. There are many less toxic alternatives available.

Let me take you on a non-toxic household tour

Once you have taken the first steps to a healthier home by ventilating your home well, vacuuming with a HEPA filter fitted vacuum and avoiding chemical cleaning products, you may want to just relax for a while. When you are ready for the next step in cleaning up your home and life, you can go room by room. Just remember that you don't have to get everything done within a

week. Don't rush; take one step at a time. If you just keep making small changes, you will end up with a much healthier home.

The living room

- When choosing furniture, curtains, or carpets, avoid anything with flame retardants. These chemicals are carcinogens and hormone disruptors; potentially able to affect your child's health and development. You can buy wool carpets, furniture and curtains that are not treated with flame retardants.
- Certain indoor plants can absorb toxins out of the air – butterfly palms, rubber plants and peace lilies are good examples. Distribute some through your house.
- Take your shoes off when you come inside the house. The soles may be covered with dirt, pesticides, or traces of dog poo – all things you do not want spread through your house, especially if you have young children crawling on the floors.

The bedroom

- This is where your child spends more than half his life. Regular mattresses can contain hundreds of toxic chemicals and they are a perfect breeding ground for dust mites. Instead look for a natural latex mattress (as long as your child is not allergic to latex) or one made of cotton or bamboo fibres (or a mix of all of them). Dust mites do not grow in latex and there is no toxic outgassing. Dust mite covers reduce the exposure to dust mites, but toxic fumes from flame retardants will still permeate them.
- Choose washable duvets and pillows and organic cotton, hemp or bamboo sheets.
- Dust the area around your child's bed at least twice a week and take dust-catching stuffed animals away from his bed. You can choose a couple of his favourite ones and wash them in a hot cycle and dry them once a week or put them in the freezer for 24 hours once a week to kill dust mites.
- Make sure there is no mould on the ceiling, walls or on curtains. Remove any mould with a microfibre cloth, then wash the cloth in hot water.
- Do not buy clothes that are labelled 'low fire danger' as they are treated with carcinogenic flame retardants which stay in the fabric for at least 50 washes. Ideally dress your children only in cotton, hemp, bamboo, linen, silk or wool and avoid artificial fibres such as nylon and polyester and anything 'wrinkle-free'.

- Always wash any new clothes before letting your child wear them, to get rid of anti-wrinkle chemicals, perfumes and dyes.
- Do not dry clean any clothes – the tetrachloroethylene used in the process is highly toxic and absorbed through the skin.

The playroom

- Choose non-toxic toys. It is better to have fewer toys, but toys of good quality. Avoid PVC (polyvinyl chloride) and plastic toys, especially cheap ones, as they expose your child to many different chemicals, sometimes even lead. I recommend buying a lead-testing kit and checking all toys (and also glazed crockery in the kitchen), as lead is a highly potent neurotoxin and even minute amounts can lower your child's IQ. For young children, get wooden toys that are not painted or coloured with non-toxic paints.
- Be creative and use things you have in your house as toys: empty cardboard boxes for stacking and to build houses; pots for your child to bang with a wooden spoon. Remember the simple pleasures of drawing on paper, cutting and gluing; playing board games, puzzles and charades. Sing songs, recite rhymes and read books with your children – these are all perfectly safe and cheap ways to have fun and promote optimal development.

The kitchen

- Use non-toxic pots and pans, such as cast iron, tempered glass or stainless steel; avoid anti-stick Teflon, which is practical but highly toxic.
- Avoid plastic – in particular the hormone-disrupting BPA (bisphenyl A). Store your leftover food in glass or stainless steel containers. We knew about the toxic effects of BPA for years before it was banned in baby bottles. There are many other 'plasticisers' in BPA-free water bottles and in a few years some of these will probably be banned too, so be extra cautious and use as little plastic as possible. Get stainless steel or shatterproof glass water bottles. BPA is also found on the inside of cans of food and leaches into the food, especially if the food is acidic, such as tomatoes.
- Do not use aluminium foil or plastic wrap – both leave toxic traces in food.
- Never ever use fly sprays or pesticides in your house. They are neurotoxins and they kill bugs by paralysing their nervous system. Human nerves and nervous systems are much bigger than a fly's is but otherwise not very different – these toxins can affect a child's brain. Natural ways to reduce insects in the kitchen are to cover your food (and not attract flies), cover

your windows with mesh, use fly swats, sticky strips or buzz lights, that kill insects through heat. Drain any stagnant water around your garden, as this is where flies and mosquitoes breed. Even the so-called natural pyrethrum is a toxin – i.e., it kills bugs – so avoid it.

- Our water is unfortunately not as pure as we would like it to be. It can contain pesticides, pathogens, chemicals, heavy metals and even traces of the medications people take (and excrete into water that is treated and reused for drinking water in some places). Filter your drinking water by installing a carbon filter at the sink. This will reduce pesticides, chlorine and other impurities in the water.

Children and toxins

There are many reasons why toxins affect children more than adults. Over the 9 months that the brain grows from a strip of a few ectodermal cells to a vastly complex organ, there are windows of great susceptibility to toxins. The blood brain barrier, which is supposed to protect the brain from toxins, is immature in young children and allows contaminants to get into the central nervous system. Children do not detoxify or excrete toxins as effectively as older people. So it is better to avoid toxic exposure for children as much as possible.



The bathroom

- Now that you have switched to healthy cleaning products, turn your attention to what you are putting on your children's skin and hair and inside their mouths. Anything you rub on them will be absorbed into the bloodstream and can have toxic effects. Many shampoos, soaps and lotions contain chemicals that disrupt the skin barrier and irritate the skin. Read the labels. Avoid anything with petrochemicals, parabens and sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS) because these can disrupt and inflame the skin barrier.
- Phthalates, often not labelled as toxins, are chemicals that make plastic more flexible and give body products a nice smell, but be aware they may have negative effects on children's development and may also cause cancer.
- We love bubbles in the bath, foam in the shampoo, nice smells in the lotions – but all too often these effects are created by toxic chemicals. Luckily you can get healthy alternatives: shampoos without SLS, lotions and creams made with essential oils and toothpaste without propylene glycol (a solvent and preservative).
- My preferred bathroom products are: Epsom salts for the bath (very calming), especially with a few drops of lavender oil; non-toxic shampoo used only as needed (children do not need to wash their hair daily or even weekly); natural, unscented soap only on really dirty skin – most dirt will come off with just water and a cloth; and pure coconut oil or a chemical-free lotion to moisturize the skin.

The laundry

- Many children react to detergents and I recommend switching to natural ones without VOCs (volatile organic compounds), phosphates, SLS, formaldehyde, bleach and dioxane – all harmful to the environment and the human body.

The hot tub or spa (if you are lucky enough to have one!)

- I recommend dropping a silver cartridge in your hot tub. That is all you have to do for an entire year – no need for weekly dosing with chlorine or any other chemicals.

Electromagnetic frequencies

- We have more and more evidence that at least 10% of the human population are sensitive to electromagnetic radiation. While many of us do not have obvious reactions to wifi, cellphone towers and smart meters,

they are clearly not something we have evolved to be around. Some children react with headaches, problems concentrating, irritability or sleeplessness. As a precaution I recommend turning off the wifi at night and whenever you are not using it; do not use wireless baby monitors (keep your baby close enough so that you can hear her, ideally in a sling or front pack during the day and in your bedroom at night); turn off your cellphone at night and do not let your child play with it, or keep it in flight mode.

As you can see there is a lot you can do to reduce your child's exposure to environmental toxins. I would always apply the precautionary principle: only use products that are proven to be safe. Most of the 80,000 chemicals registered for various industrial and household uses have not been tested for safety – but you can avoid them and use safe, natural alternatives. Check www.ewg.org for safe, non-toxic cleaning products, sunscreens and other skin care products.

Reader's Reviews

"Dr Leila Masson's A- Z on health is just amazing. I recommend it to all my clients and use it myself for my own 3 boys. It is so empowering to be able to use natural treatments and remedies rather than just standard antibiotics and pain relief from pharmaceuticals. Learning about health and understanding the fundamentals of immunity is a must for all parents. It is such a wonderful feeling being able to avoid going to the Dr and using medications, turning to natural herbs and supplements instead for support."

– <https://www.fishpond.com.au>

"As a new mum and working nutritionist, I highly recommend this book! I'm often scanning pages and sending them off to family and other mums because the information is so practical and keeps us all managing our children's health without the need for regular doctor visits or antibiotics. It's become a bible on our shelves!"

– <https://www.fishpond.com.au>

"Such an excellent book, I recommend it to all I know, very practical and well written. The only gift you need to give to families this holiday season."

– <https://www.fishpond.com.au>

"This book is my go-to every time our 3 children fall ill, its full of helpful remedies which really work and it is so easy to use and follow."

– <https://www.fishpond.com.au>

"A fantastic resource to have on hand. Great easy to understand advice and recommendations. A must-have!"

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available at
  

Help your child get better and
stay well naturally

