

The
Gerber
Generation



Supporting your baby's healthy immune system

Your baby's immune system is designed to protect her. It's a complex network of cells, tissues and organs that work together to help keep her healthy. One of the many ways the immune system works is by maintaining natural protective barriers that help block germs and other unwanted elements from entering her body. The lining of her digestive tract is a key protective barrier and plays a major role in the development of her healthy defense system.

The role of bacteria in the digestive system

Certain "good bacteria" are needed for healthy development of this natural protective barrier. Emerging science supports the important role of these bacteria in the development of an infant's immune system and overall health.

When babies are still in the womb, their digestive tracts are considered sterile, and no bacteria or cultures are present. After birth, cultures begin to develop. This is a normal process. What your baby is fed during the first few weeks and months makes a big difference in the types of cultures that begin to develop in her digestive tract.

Benefits of breastfeeding

Breastmilk is the best source of nutrition for your baby's first year. Breastfeeding is important for normal

immune system development in infants because breastmilk contains probiotics, which are good bacteria. In addition, breastfeeding during the first months of life helps protect against the development of allergies. Babies who are breastfed also receive antibodies from breastmilk. Many experts believe these early defenses may help protect your baby. This is another reason breastfeeding is a good choice.

Probiotics are good bacteria

The word probiotic literally means "for life." Probiotics are good bacteria that can provide certain health benefits for your baby when taken in adequate amounts—particularly for her immune and digestive systems. The most commonly used probiotics in foods and supplements include bacterial strains of bifidobacterium and lactobacillus.

Babies who are breastfed have an abundance (about 90%) of one particular type of probiotic in the digestive tract. These beneficial bacteria are called bifidobacteria. They create protective colonies in your baby's digestive tract from the first week after birth.

Formula-fed babies

Most formula-fed babies have less beneficial bifidobacteria—about one-tenth the level of breastfed

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Q&A

Q: What are prebiotics?

A: Prebiotics are naturally found in breastmilk. They are a type of carbohydrate that the body can't digest; these prebiotics end up in the lower digestive tract where they act as "food" for the probiotics and help allow probiotics to grow in your baby's digestive tract. Prebiotics help support immune system development and promote healthy digestion.

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infants. If you choose to formula feed, choose a formula that contains probiotics designed to support her healthy immune system and which may offer some of the protective benefits of breastmilk. If you cannot or choose not to breastfeed, selecting an infant formula with bifidobacteria probiotics may offer some of the protective benefits of breastmilk.

How can I help support my baby's immune system when she begins to eat solid foods?

When your baby's ready for solids, offer healthy food choices. A variety of fruits and vegetables each day will help support your baby's immune system. Foods rich in vitamins C, A and E as well as foods rich in iron and protein and zinc are particularly beneficial. Citrus fruits are rich in vitamin C; carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach and cantaloupe are examples of good vitamin A sources. High sources of vitamin E include salmon

or sardines as well as food fortified with vitamin E. Iron-fortified infant cereals are a good source of iron and are important to include in the diets of children between 6 months and 3 years of age. Some infant cereals are also supplemented with bifidobacteria to provide ongoing immune system benefits, as are some formulas for older babies. Iron needs can also be supported when your baby starts to consume meats.

Toddlers also require healthy food choices. Because a toddler's diet can include many more foods and beverages than a baby's does, toddlers can receive probiotics from many types of foods such as some yogurts, yogurt drinks, cheese and fermented milk products like kefir. In addition, probiotics can now be found in certain formulas designed for toddlers.

Overall, a healthy digestive tract is extremely important for immune system health and the overall health of your baby.

Q: Does breastfeeding help support my baby's immunity?

A: Breastfeeding supports immunity not only due to the good bacteria gained from the close physical contact during breastfeeding, but also due to the probiotics in breastmilk. Breastmilk contains probiotics including bifidobacteria which live in your baby's digestive tract from the first week after birth. These "good bacteria" help to protect your baby as she matures and support her defense system against disease. In addition, breastmilk contains other components, such as antibodies that help support the development of an infant's immune system.

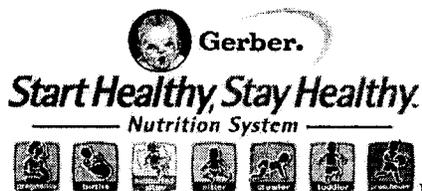
Q: How can my baby get probiotics if I am not breastfeeding?

A: Infant and toddler formulas that contain probiotics are available. They can help your baby maintain a healthy level of beneficial bacteria.

Q: How long will the benefits last if my baby only consumes probiotics occasionally?

A: Since probiotics do not remain in the gut for a long time, the benefits of probiotics are likely to be achieved as long as the probiotics are consumed.

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Together we can nurture a healthier generation

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