

## THE BEST MEDICINE

Sometimes, therapeutic treatments come naturally

By Chandra Orr

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For as long as children have had scratchy throats, upset tummies, bug bites, sunburns and rashes, parents have been putting their trust in Mother Nature. Remember gargling with salt water to soothe a sore throat? Sure, it tasted bad, but mom was onto something.

"Over the past 10 years, children's health care has enjoyed a return to a more natural approach to treatment just as adult medicine has," said Dr. Georgianna Donadio, founder and director of the National Institute of Whole Health in Wellesley, Mass.

When a medicine as seemingly benign as aspirin can result in a life-threatening condition for some children, a natural approach seems a logical alternative. From herbs like lemon verbena, which soothes sore throats, to beneficial bacteria that aid in digestive health, natural remedies have the power to treat your child's most common complaints without the strong side effects associated with many pharmaceuticals.

"Most over-the-counter and prescription drugs are very strong - in fact, usually they are too strong for children," said Dr. Narinder Duggal, medical director of Liberty Bay Internal Medicine, a private practice in Paulsbo, Wash.

"Prescription and over-the-counter drugs tend to 'turn off' bodily systems and cause an imbalance, rather than re-balancing the body," Duggal explained. "Natural products tend to normalize the biology of the area affected - they aid and enhance the immune system."

To boost the immune system, start with the stomach.

"It is well recognized that more than 50 percent of our immune system is found in our digestive system. So, one of the first place we need to be looking and helping is our digestive system, specifically the good bacteria found inside the digestive tract," said Len Lopez, a clinical nutritionist and chiropractic sports physician and host of the Internet radio show "Action Steps for Health." Those good bacteria, or probiotics, are getting a lot of press these days - and for good reason. Beneficial bacteria like acidophilus and bifidobacterium, which are common additives in yogurt and milk, have the power to aid digestion and boost immunity.

Things like antibiotics and steroid treatments can disrupt the delicate balance of naturally occurring microorganisms in the digestive tract. Probiotic foods and supplements help replenish the good bacteria, which make it difficult for harmful bacteria to thrive, effectively boosting the immune system. For more specific complaints, consider the following:

- Vitamin D, vitamin C and echinacea also aid the immune system. Look for liquid vitamin D and pure vitamin C supplements. Look for children's dosages of echinacea supplements made with glycerin rather than alcohol.
- Fennel and chamomile have a soothing effect on the stomach. Chamomile tea, which contains no caffeine, is known to relieve irritation and heartburn. Fennel, an herb often sold as Gripe Water, also calms the digestive system by soothing irritation to the mucous membranes.
- Ginger has been shown to reduce nausea. Flat ginger ale, ginger tea or ground ginger root in warm water will help settle upset stomachs.
- Oatmeal and Epsom salts calm the skin. Swollen bug bites, dermatitis and itchy skin rashes all benefit from a warm oatmeal or Epsom salt bath.
- Fresh aloe vera also works well for dermatitis and it quickly takes the sting out of sunburns.
- Plum juice and fresh apples help relieve constipation, as does two cups of warm water on an empty stomach the first thing in the morning.
- An herbal tea of lemon verbena, slippery elm, cherry bark or licorice will soothe a sore throat. Fresh lemon and honey added to tea or warm water will also ease symptoms.

"Natural" isn't synonymous with do-it-yourself medical care. It may be natural - and it may be sitting on the drugstore shelf - but that doesn't mean it's safe. Plenty of natural remedies pose as much danger as potent pharmaceuticals. Before treating any childhood illness, parents should do their research and talk with a doctor that specializes in integrative health.

"You don't ask your OB/GYN to help with your shoulder pain, nor do you ask your cardiologist to help with your digestive problems," Lopez said.

In other words, if you're interested in natural remedies for your children, seek out a pediatrician with experience in treating childhood ailments naturally.

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