



Get Messy!

The importance of exposing your children to a diverse range of bacteria:

Summer is coming, and for new parents, the idea of their infant being exposed to new, unfamiliar environments can be daunting. We're taught our whole lives to wash our hands constantly, disinfect everything, and avoid germs at all costs.

However, living a germ-free life, it turns out, can cause much more harm than good. Especially when it comes to infants with a young, developing microbiome.

From the moment we're born, our body is immediately populated by trillions of tiny microbes, the first of which come from the mother's birth canal, gut, skin and breast milk. The types of microbes you receive depend on where you're born, how you were delivered, and essentially every surface you touch in the first 24 hours of life. Surprisingly, these factors can impact your health well into the future.

A healthy skin microbiome appears to begin during and shortly after birth with a flurry of immune activity. Researchers at the University of California San Francisco found that within days of birth there is a large amount of T-cell activity that creates tolerance in the immune system to the bacteria on the skin. This is a critical factor in the immune system knowing not to attack the normal and healthy bacteria on the skin.

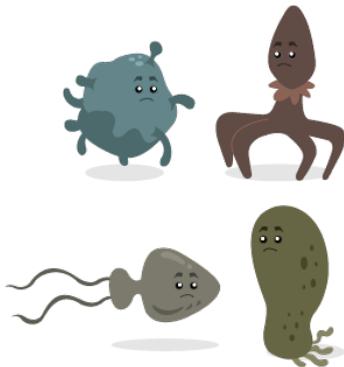


Newborns and young infants start out with a limited number of microbial species:

As babies come into contact with more people and new environments, they acquire additional species, and the composition of their microbiota begins to change and become more distinct.

Get Messy!

- PATHOGENS -



For example, the microbes on the skin start to look different than those in the gut. As babies use their hands to reach for toys and other objects, the microbes can even start to differ between each of their hands!

From infancy through pre-school years:

Children's microbes continue to change and even resemble the microbes of their family members. By the age of 3, a child's microbiome stabilizes and looks more like adults. Events such as fever, a course of antibiotics, or the introduction of new foods can all alter the microbiome.

Additionally, research has shown that children may actually benefit from exposure to germs – offering greater protection from illnesses, allergies and other autoimmune diseases later in life. In fact, some studies show children who grow up on farms, attend day care, or have pets are less likely to experience immune-related illnesses.

The modern home may not be as sterile as a hospital, however, it is extremely unlikely that there is any space in your house that is infested with deadly pathogens that will harm your infant. In fact, this lack of sterility allows your child's microbiome to grow and diversify. The more types of bacteria that a developing human is exposed to, the stronger their immune system will be. Obviously, things like raw meat should be treated with care, however there is not much else in the average Canadian home that will seriously harm a child, assuming that no one is currently sick. Due to vaccinations, even bathrooms are virtually harmless to a wandering toddler (if cleaning products are safely kept out of reach, of course).

So, let them play outside. In the immortalized words of Mrs. Frizzle, take chances, make mistakes, and GET MESSY!

To learn more about the microbiome take our interactive tour! ----->

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Want to RISE up for Digestive Health? This summer we're hosting our annual fundraiser in Collingwood Ontario! Join us and help us raise funds for research and awareness initiatives! Together we can help the 20,000,000 Canadians who are affected! Click below to join!

