

Prebiotics and the Immune System

Friendly bacteria are an integral part of a baby's immune system.

Prebiotics are the food for the friendly bacteria in the tummy and are found naturally in breastmilk. Prebiotics encourage the growth of these friendly bacteria and as a result, help reduce the numbers of potentially harmful bacteria colonising the gut.⁸

Breastmilk, which naturally contains Prebiotics, strengthens a baby's immune system as indicated by a reduced incidence of infection and allergy in breastfed babies.³⁻⁷



FACT:

Prebiotics are often confused with Probiotics. Probiotics are live, friendly bacteria. These are often added to foods such as yoghurts or health drinks. Prebiotics, however, are the food for the friendly bacteria that are already present in your tummy.

Summary

- A baby is born with an immature immune system
- Breastfeeding from birth is best for baby
- Breastmilk confers passive immunity via the transfer of antibodies from mother to baby
- Breastmilk also contains Prebiotics to help strengthen a baby's natural immune system

For further information and advice, speak to your midwife or health visitor. Alternatively, contact the Milupa Aptamil Careline on 08457 623 628 or visit the website www.milupa-aptamil.co.uk

References:

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Breastfeeding, Prebiotics and the Immune system



FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL AND PARENT USE

What is the Immune System and why is it so important?



The immune system is the way the body protects itself from invasion from harmful foreign bodies such as bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites.

It is made up of a network of defences including physical barriers, such as the skin and the gut, which prevent potentially harmful microorganisms from entering the body. Should these succeed in getting through, the immune system's internal defences, such as white blood cells and antibodies, are activated and released into the bloodstream to target the microorganisms.

FACT:

2/3rds of the body's immune system is located in the gut¹

The importance of your baby's natural immune system

A baby is born with an immature immune system. Whilst in the womb, a sterile environment, a baby comes into contact with very few potentially harmful bacteria. They receive some protection from the mother via antibodies delivered across the placenta. This is called "passive immunity".

When the baby is born, it comes into contact with both friendly and potentially harmful bacteria. This contact helps develop their immune system and is called "active immunity," however, it is still in the very early stages of maturation and your baby is therefore still highly vulnerable to infection at this time.

Breastfeeding and the Immune System

Breastfeeding from birth is the best way to help strengthen your baby's developing immune system.

Colostrum, which is the milk that is produced during the first few days after birth, contains a "package" of protective ingredients such as white blood cells, antibodies and Prebiotics. This is why it is so important to breastfeed if at all possible, even for just these early days, as colostrum has a high concentration of these special ingredients.

Mature breastmilk also contains these protective ingredients but in a lower concentration than colostrum. However, it is still important to help strengthen your baby's natural immune system as your baby continues to receive passive immunity with the transfer of antibodies from your breastmilk.

FACT:

Prebiotics are naturally found in breastmilk as well as in many foods such as bananas, tomatoes and asparagus²



Breastfeeding has also been shown to help protect babies against gastrointestinal and respiratory infections³⁻⁵ and is associated with protection against the development of some allergies^{6,7}.