

WARMTH, STRENGTH, AND FREEDOM

by M. Kelly Sutton MD 11/04

There are times when I sound more like a grandmother than a doctor in advising families how to be healthy. 'Dress warmly!' 'Eat a good breakfast!' 'Get to bed early!' 'Let your body fight its own colds!' But each of these advisories is powerful, no matter how simple it sounds.

WARMTH

Warmth is related to the element fire. All the other elements – earth, air, water – are easily bounded. Warmth goes through boundaries. This is no surprise when you think of the love (emotional warmth/fire) you feel for your children. Nothing stops it. (That is why you are reading this.)

For this reason, human skin generally needs a layer of protective clothing to keep the body at the temperature at which it works best: approximately 98.6. Warmth's tendency is to go out, to radiate, and the body loses heat unless it is stopped. We know the law of equilibrium from physics, or from common sense. If we are in a 70 degree room, and our skin is bare, then our body radiates its 98+ degrees into the 70 degree room. We can't make a room warm enough to avoid clothing without drying out the delicate mucous membranes of the respiratory tract. Preserving the body's warmth with layers of clothing promotes health.

Healthy human beings have a rhythmic body temperature of approximately 98.6, slightly lower in morning than evening. Cold is a stress for the body. Touch your child's fingers and toes -- with your own warm hand. (If your hand is cool/cold, first warm it up.) Then feel other parts: the trunk, front and back, abdomen, forehead, chest. The fingers and toes should be as warm as the warmest part of the body. If they are not, the child is dealing with cold stress, and you can help him/her a great deal by changing the clothing so that fingers and toes become as warm as they should be. Shunting blood away from the extremities is a survival mechanism in the body. It protects the vital organs (heart, lungs, liver, kidneys).

Cold stress can make children overactive, in an effort to warm up. Warm clothing allows them to settle down, join in group activity, focus and learn

In some children coldness interferes with normal weight gain. I have seen one wiry 5-year-old in New Hampshire who gained two pounds in the first week her mother put her in wool underwear. Runny noses commonly are related to coldness. And coldness is a significant factor in more important immune suppression in a very significant way. 'The skin is the proper place for disease to happen,' states an old holistic medicine pearl. If the skin is cool, the battle with a common germ cannot be waged on the skin. The blood has gone into the deeper organs, and with it, the battle is carried to deeper organs. This is an important way that complications happen from common illnesses, such as a cold or chicken pox. In medical school, I first saw in my Internal Medicine textbook, that chickenpox encephalitis commonly occurs when there are very few pox on the body. The inflammation does little damage on the skin, but can do a great deal of damage in a deeper organ. Keeping the skin warm keeps the battle with a germ where it is safe for the body. I have heard a German pediatrician describe how he recommends to parents of children with measles that the parent rub the calves with dry terry cloth until the calves are pink. This over-warming action draws the circulation to the surface, and pulls the battle with the germ to a safe place, outward and downward, away from vital organs.

This principle can be applied in daily life simply by dressing warmly, and being attentive to the warmth of our children's extremities. We both prevent illnesses, and keep their course uncomplicated if they occur, by having warm extremities.

Physical warmth is an early sense for the newborn baby, along with smell, taste, and hearing. But the child does not sense temperature accurately until about age 9. You are not surprised when a toddler runs around the house naked, and older kids and adults are reaching for shoes and sweaters. We have all seen this. In New Hampshire, the kindergarteners rush into the lakes on Memorial Day, and the third graders look at them like 'what's wrong with you!?'

So you, the parent, must decide what is the right clothing for the young person you are

responsible for. Don't ASK the young child 'what do you want to wear?' This question is appropriate at times for an older child, but it is scary for a young child to be the one making a decision in the presence of an adult. It is hard in our culture NOT to ask our children what they want, because we hear it so commonly. I remember falling into this and asking my 5 yr old son what t-shirt he wanted, and he looked at me and said 'I don't know. You're the mommy!' So often our kids show us what we should have known. Be willing to BE the Mommy or the Daddy. Make the decision about the clothes you feel are right for the climate, and say with surety: 'Here's your undershirt and top, your tights and skirt. Let's get dressed. You're set for a wonderful day!' Your authority is their security. Their strength is modeled after yours, so give them a strong, insightful, kind authority figure.

But what to wear, if hands and feet are cold? The rule I've used in New Hampshire is to begin with is three layers on the top with one tucked in, and two layers on the bottom. One of these should be like a second skin, closely investing the body, not baggy. This means long underwear, or tights, or at the very least an undershirt. If the child is sweaty, take off a layer. If the child is still cool to touch, change to a warmer fabric. Natural fabrics breathe best: cotton, silk, and wool. Down does not breathe, nor do synthetics generally, so body heat is trapped if the person is overdressed. Cotton can be both cooling and warming, and is good for hot countries and Arizona summers. Silk is more warming, then wool-silk, and wool is warmest. Sources for children's long underwear are: www.waldorfearlychildhood.org, (look for Mira, Lilling, Morning Rose), www.danishwool.com, www.ecomall.com, www.waldorfshop.net.

If you have a newborn (or you may apply the story to any age), and want to use a layer of wool warmth immediately, while you wait for an order of infant long underwear to come, you have an alternative. Simply put a pair of adult wool sox on the baby's legs -- they will be thigh high. And use a toddler's wool sweater on the infant, rolling up the arms, etc., so baby can breathe, etc. -- you have a wool tunic.

A helpful image to use is that foxes and rabbits grow fur, thicker in the winter than the summer. We didn't -- so we have to put on our fur to be able to run around outside like foxes and rabbits in the winter. Hats, gloves, sox are all part of the fur we didn't grow. Clothed well, we have new freedom to move outdoors. Long underwear in some seasons eliminates the need for bulky outerwear, and movement is less restrained.

So you have the knowledge of WHAT to do, and are confident in your authority as a parent being the best thing for them. Then life happens. The child is simultaneously developing his will, so a wonderful opportunity comes for the child to say 'NO!!' to any parental statement, including clothes. This requires tact, cleverness, determination -- every adult attribute in the book. Don't rush into action. Wait, watch, assess, and plan HOW to do this thing you know is good for your kids. A young girl may need stylish (warm) tights or long johns that you have seen ballerinas wear, because, after all, their leg muscles dance more beautifully if they are warm. A fierce 4-year-old warrior may need a swashbuckling (warm) pirate muscle shirt, leggings, and sash, with a story of how to stand and walk like a pirate as they are put on. A two year old may just need a chase around the room, a friendly capture, and a lot of loving contact as he/she is poured into warm layers. Some children will need to know you consider this so important that favorite activities are actually dependent on dressing correctly, or that some other consequence is incurred. And then, you must stick to your word. Because if you don't really stay home from sledding because the long underwear couldn't go on when you said it must, then maybe you won't really follow through on all the promises of love you have made. The child's mind is consistent even though it is not fully conscious. It is better not to threaten a consequence unless you are one hundred per cent ready to carry it out. Your word is your word, whether it is spoken as lawgiver, or pledging love forever.

There is no virtue to overdressing. July in southern Arizona is not the time to insist on the 3-on-top and 2-on-the bottom. The way to make the decision at any time is to feel the child's fingers and toes, rather than to abstractly apply a rule.

BREAKFAST

Eat protein generously at breakfast. Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, supper like a pauper, the saying goes -- and it can be changed to the other gender: queen, princess, bag lady.

Protein at breakfast stabilizes the blood sugar for the whole day. Lunch protein cannot do the same job; the window of opportunity is past. EVERYONE has better co-ordination, endurance, moods, judgment and ability to learn, when blood sugar is stable. With this kind of outcome, do we ever want our children to skip breakfast? The first thing I ask with any kind of mood or energy issue is to eat a big breakfast.

Options: eggs of any sort, cottage cheese blintzes, smoothies with protein powder (preferably not soy), grilled cheese sandwiches, cheeseburgers, chicken tenders, fish fillets, burritos, chili. Be unconventional. Any protein food is fair game -- it doesn't have to be classic 'breakfast' food. You cannot overeat at breakfast -- protein and fat are metabolized faster early in the day than later. It is harder to digest heavy foods late in the day, so it is important NOT to eat a big supper, or it will sit partly digested all night, and interfere with morning appetite. For adults, it is important NOT to have coffee before food, because coffee kills the appetite, and we need our appetite in the morning.

Sometimes this 'big breakfast' ideal needs parental reinforcement. I had great success with my teenage boys telling them they would not get a ride to school unless they ate the breakfast I put in front of them. We lived 4 blocks from school. They complained, they ate, I drove. As they got older and were driving themselves from a further distance, occasionally they would wake up so late, they would eat very little. I would just say 'do the best you can,' letting them know what I think is important, but that I trust them. No rule can substitute for human judgment, and older kids need some freedom to vary from house rules and learn from life and how they feel; trust your instinct and love for them in choosing an approach. It is too much to expect sleepy kids to make their own big breakfast: this is the homework we parents have -- we parents must be real cooks every morning if at all possible.

SUPPLEMENTS

There is one supplement which I think is universally important, because research has found it to benefit so many physical and mental health issues: omega 3 essential fatty acids. The American diet is high in its opposite, omega 6, which causes inflammation and lowers omega 3 levels. Good sources of omega 3 efa's are: flax seed (one tablespoon maximum daily for adults, freshly ground)-- if you are blood type O this is especially valuable; and Nordic Naturals Arctic Cod Liver Oil for other blood types (there is no upper limit to safe use of this substance, and one teaspoon per day could be used for gradeschool children upwards).

The more processed our food is, the more we need a vitamin-mineral supplement. This comes with today's overbusy lives. Stress, alcohol and caffeine all consume B vitamins. There are times when toddlers refuse vegetables for months. In each of these situations, a multi-vitamin- mineral makes sense. In general, I recommend a food-based supplement for general support of health. 'Natural' supplements are likely to contain life forces and supportive micronutrients which are not available in synthetic formulations.

Research continually shows the value of specific nutrients for specific illnesses, and sometimes these must be synthetic simply to get a large enough amount of the vitamin or mineral required. We may find that people genetically require different amounts of vitamins. Medicine is still in a stage of looking at statistical analyses of large groups of people to find what usually works, but the refinement of understanding individual biochemistry is yet to be done. Sometimes parents' observations and intuitions can bring the child benefits science will take decades to arrive at. Use of supplements is generally safe for parents to undertake, unless mega-doses are used consistently. A family that uses supplements in large doses should check with a healthcare practitioner periodically.

REST AND RHYTHM

Machines are either on or off independent of environment usually, while living beings have rhythms, gentle alternations of activity and rest, breathing in and breathing out, that are fundamentally tied to the Sun. Every Waldorf kindergarden teacher works very consciously to provide focused activity, then free play or outdoors time. In this way, the child is carried through the day harmoniously, with the least exhaustion, the least likelihood of overload or eventual

illness. and the greatest chance for unfolding his/her human potential creatively.

Our physical make-up is tied to the sun's movement, light and dark. The biorhythms of enzymes and hormones follow the diurnal (daily light and dark) rhythm, even if we work night shift. Bigger rhythms of month and year and lifetime are present, and more being discovered.

If we live in sync with the way our body is designed, we will have the greatest health. For children, whose task is to grow and to learn, this means regular waking, rest, and sleeping times, and regular mealtimes. Like the gradual change of seasons brings gradual change of light, we need not be rigid, but in general have a few anchors in the day that are constant. Most important are bedtime and breakfast time, in my experience.

The hours before midnight are the most restorative. So for an adult, eight hours sleep beginning at 9 pm is more valuable than eight hours beginning at midnight. A child needs more sleep, in varying amounts at different ages, and sometimes differing from one child to the next. The younger the child, the earlier the bedtime. A well-slept child generally will awaken spontaneously and be happy. If the child is very difficult to arouse or repeatedly grumpy, the bedtime should be nudged earlier until a better morning experience is seen. In adolescence, the cycle shifts later, and the average sleep need is nine hours and fifteen minutes daily. Since high schools often start very early in the morning, a significant stress is unavoidably part of the school week for adolescents.

Lavender oil as massage, or fragrance on bedclothing, or as warm bath as part of bedtime ritual, is very helpful for those children who tend to be alert at bedtime.

The bedtime ritual is wonderful to begin with very young children, as a habit of letting go develops, leading to sound sleep, and being secure enough to sleep alone. The ritual can include bath, story, tuck-in, prayer, kiss with calm 'sleep tight. love you. see you in the morning.' The young child's ritualistic approach to life is hierarchical by nature, with Mommy and Daddy all-powerful in his/her young eyes. The natural order of the world at this age can readily include God or Higher Power and Angels or Guardian spirits and be of value to the child's sense of order and security in the world. Later, when the nine-year-change comes, and a child senses deeply his separateness from his parents, the early images of God and higher beings protecting and guiding his daily actions and sleep can be reassuring in facing this first big realization of separateness.

A light supper, with little protein or completely vegetarian, helps sleep come easily. Remember, we want to wake up with an appetite for breakfast, the foundation meal of the day's activities, so it's best not to overload at night. Time-honored warm milk is a fine sleep-inducer. Carbohydrates are sleepy foods, while protein, fat, salt, and caffeine tend to wake us up.

Almost all children are born with some tendency to one-sidedness, and our task as parents is to help them find balance. The rhythm of the day shows whether it is hard for our youngster to settle down, or hard to get up and move about, and we can help bring about comfort with both sides of movement, etc.

Should a child have difficulty waking up in the morning, even after enough hours of sleep, rosemary lotion in cool water is an invigorating fragrance and can be applied to the face (forehead, then cheeks) carefully with a damp cloth to bring alertness. A positive statement about the day ahead is an important medicine in this treatment: 'good morning! what has that robin done outside your window since yesterday? I have a wonderful breakfast ready for you! rise and shine! what a wonderful day it is!'

Some call the first three months of life 'the fourth trimester' because even though the baby is outside the uterus, enormous development is occurring. All of a sudden with birth, blood circulation takes a different path, and breathing air begins. Light and dark, experienced minimally through the wall of the mother's uterus and abdomen, are no longer muted. The taste of milk comes for the first time in response to the built-in ability to suck. Rhythm can be a challenge for an infant with so many new sensations and functions happening at once. Two extremes of handling rhythm for infants are rigid scheduling, and 'on demand' feeding. It's helpful for the infant to get past the early chaos, and into a middle ground, a rhythm that changes when needs change. If a child is sick or teething or grows, then we do not hold rigidly to an old

pattern. Some infants establish their own; others need help. Usually in the first month the timing of a baby's eating and sleeping can be observed, and gradually shifted toward what works for the whole family and for the baby's health, with alertness in the daytime, and an early-to-bed early-to-rise pattern. The family bed can be helpful early on, or during illness, when close observation is required. But a child grows up more secure if more than one person (not just Mom) can put him/her to sleep at night, and if he/she can begin the night alone in bed. It's not difficult to see the message we give if from early on we repeatedly link bedtime with only one person, and if falling asleep at night requires sleeping in bed with an adult: 'maybe Mom is the only one I'm safe with; maybe I can't do it alone.' Children take our acts as if they are decisions given by God, so we want to think about our habitual acts in order to build strength in the child, and a sense of security in the world in general.

THE COMMON COLD, THE USUAL CHILDHOOD ILLNESSES

Recognize acute illness as an exercise class for the immune system, and treat in a non-suppressive way. It is not a sign of immune breakdown, it is a chance for strengthening. The big three to help the body do its best in fighting acute illness are: WARMTH, REST, and CLEANSING. Add a few low potency homeopathic remedies and herbs, and you can support the body in this important immune work, not simply suppress symptoms. The person(s) around a sick patient can be powerful medicine. The inner state we carry to our sick family members ideally would be attentive to them, peaceful, positive. The senses should not be overloaded with noise and other stimulation. The attachment at the end is a list of some of my favorite remedies for common acute illnesses.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

All of these advisories support VEGETATIVE functions, the unconscious health-giving parts of a human being that are the bank account we draw on for growth, learning, and later, our work in life. (This vegetative bank account is also called the etheric forces in Anthroposophic medical terminology. As adults, the strength of our etheric body manifests as our vitality, our ability to recover, to have energy, or to endure.) A child's job is to grow, and to learn things appropriate to his/her age. With a strong foundation of warmth, nutrition, rest, rhythm, immune exercise from ordinary acute illness if the body in its wisdom allows it -- the child's optimal development proceeds, and a strong physical foundation is laid for the entire adult life. The vegetative functions are sometimes characterized by the cow, who is mostly a metabolic creature, chewing, making milk, sitting and walking and lying down. No executive tendencies here, nor highly developed sense organs. A masterful vegetative existence.

The other pole of the human being, opposite the vegetative, is the CONSCIOUS pole. The parent (or teacher) does this work in the child's life, so the child does not have to draw on the bank account of vegetative forces by making decisions too early. Judgment, analysis, logic, decision-making are characterized by the far-seeing eagle, whose highly developed sense capacity is combined with the cunning and decisive movement of a predator, a majestic lord of the skies.

As parents of young children (1-7 yr old), you are protectors of the cow-nature, the vegetative foundation, which your child will use throughout his/her life. As enormous physical growth takes place, the child uses limbs and explores movement thoroughly. The child is imitative, copying the way Daddy sits with the newspaper, or insisting Mommy sit at only her right place at the table, like a learned ritual the child has mastered. This physical life is accompanied by a mental connection with images, not reason. Thus the love of bedtime stories, preferably told, not read, and repeated till every beloved detail is memorized. Also you find the young child's questions more satisfactorily met by a picture than an analytic explanation. Some questions can even be better avoided, if they are asking for adult information. But you can always comment 'What a wonderful mind you have! You ask such wonderful questions! Let's get your teddy bear next to you for nap/lunch.' The child has made contact, you have responded lovingly and appropriately.

You see that spark, the flashes of individuality that is waiting to show itself fully. Your wisdom holds the child's day steady, rhythmic, fed and bedded, building the strength of the vegetative side of your eagle-to-be. It requires trust and patience to let the child unfold in his/her own time, and not call on adolescent or adult qualities too early. This time of life can be boring for parents, who have full adult capacities and thrive on change and excitement, not routine. Your sacrifice is commendable. Parenting is among the hardest jobs there are, and each stage of childhood gives

parents an opportunity for a different form of selflessness.

The heart of childhood is 7-14 yr old, when a respect for worthy authority is natural, and feeling opens for beauty itself in the world around. More than vegetative support is required now. The lion's heart of courage and strength must be met, with stories of the same, and exposure to real artistic expression so the beginning of the moral nature is fed with the beauty and strength it is seeking. This is often the age of the least illness, and the most harmonious time of childhood.

But change comes, and the young Philadelphia lawyer casts a disgusted glance at the parents who have brought him/her thus far -- usually some time around 8th grade. The eagle's predatory power is evident. No more contented baby learning movement and the physical world, nor sweet-natured heartfelt child growing before your eyes. The intellect is unfolding, and the first object of critical analysis is often the parents. It's good timing that powers of judgment and analysis begin to unfold just as puberty begins. Let the intellect's sharp powers master the hormones that rage. From 14-21, the individuality is more pronounced, decision making should be shared and guided in preparation for independence. Privacy is important. Learning results of choices, such as wise consequences in the home, helps put control of behavior inside the individual.

The wise 'governance' of a child goes in stages somewhat like human history has evolved. The young child is benefited by a benign despot, the loving parental authority; in the middle years, the child natively respects authority, but has a developing sense of contributing his/her wants and using his/her abilities for the benefit of the group; democracy is built into the adolescent, and the parent gives the structure of what the society of the family does or doesn't tolerate by virtue of structuring communication and consequences.

The stages of development are given at their usual ages, but there will be early hints of what is to come and echoes of prior times varying with each individual. Behaviors I described may be different due to the family dynamic, or the particular learning path the individual child carries as part of his/her destiny, or our culture. The culture we live in pushes adult information into even the very young child's life -- computers and IQ testing are part of some preschool programs. Adult decisions are often part of the oldest or the only child's daily diet of conversation. Sexualized clothing and media surround children of every age, and give parents a challenge to minimize this early maturation influence. Early intellectualizing and early sexual information pulls the young child out of the vegetative physical mode that is home for him or her, and spends the child's etheric forces on coping and understanding rather than physical growth.

As nuclear families rear children alone in today's culture, grandmothers are hard to come by. The pediatrician and family doctor assume the role that aunts and grandmothers had in helping with illness and childrearing. But the swap medicalizes common events, and we take a further step down the pharmaceutical- answer-for- everything road. I hope this work can reawaken faith in the capacity of the human body, enlarged with the scientific understanding that shows why this faith is reasonable, reconnect us with the healing gifts of nature as they are enhanced with human insight and become remedies, and show through the caring for our children, the presence and power of the human spirit.

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