

# Positive Parenting Malaysia


The Official Guide Series On Maternal, Child &  
Family Care By The Malaysian Paediatric Association

## Parents vs Social Media: Influences on Children



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## Parenting in the Age of Social Media

Social media plays a huge role in the lives of many people these days, including children. Most teens nowadays have multiple social media accounts and are adept at navigating the sites. In fact, it is not surprising to see children as young as seven years old using the internet and browsing the social media feed. Some parents even set up an account for their baby or use social media as a "digital nanny".

This matter is addressed in this issue's Feature section as we discuss the influence of social media on children's lives and their relationships with parents, as well as the things that parents can do to keep things in control. We also talk about various other parenting topics in this issue, such as the challenges faced by the Sandwich Generation, tips when travelling with little children, some advice when raising a multilingual child and many others.

The purpose of these write-ups is to guide you in the lifelong voyage of parenthood and hopefully they serve our intention. You can also check out past articles on our website ([www.mypositiveparenting.org](http://www.mypositiveparenting.org)). And remember to follow us on Facebook (@positiveparentingmalaysia), Instagram (@mypositiveparenting), YouTube (ParentFlix) and Spotify (ParentFlix) too!

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## contents

### Feature

4 Parents vs Social Media: Influences on Children

### Family Planning & Pregnancy

9 Pregnancy & Work: A Guide for Expectant Mothers

### Family Wellness

10 Navigating Life as The Sandwich Generation

13 The Beauty in Simplicity

### Child Health

15 Understanding COVID-19 & SARS-CoV-2 Variants

17 Why Does My Child Need to Take So Many Doses of the Same Vaccine?

20 Liver Diseases in Children

23 Not Just A Mild Cough

25 Safe and Happy Trips with My Little Traveller

28 Prediabetes: Prevent Diabetes Before It's Too Late!

### Nutrition & Healthy Living

30 Mother's Milk: The Best Food for Newborns

### Child Development

31 Raising a Multilingual Child

### My Positive Teen

33 Supporting Your Teenager During Puberty

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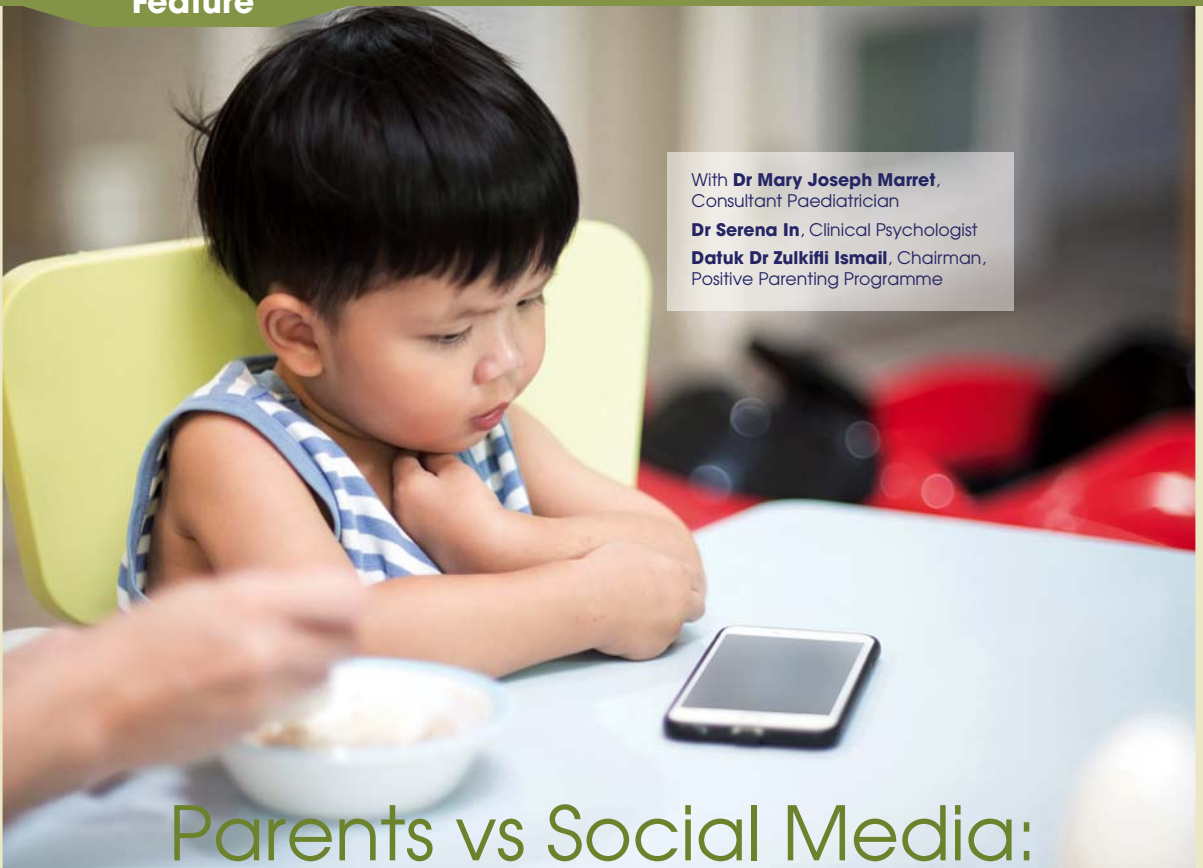
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With **Dr Mary Joseph Marret**,  
Consultant Paediatrician

**Dr Serena In**, Clinical Psychologist

**Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail**, Chairman,  
Positive Parenting Programme



# Parents vs Social Media: Influences on Children

*Social media has become an inseparable part of our children's lives. Today's ever-evolving digital world with various benefits and challenges requires parents to adjust their approach to parenting. Constant exposure of our children to social media and smart gadgets at a young age has numerous possible long-term consequences that many parents are unaware of. It is therefore vital for parents to understand the complex interactions that exist between social media, parenting, and children.*

## How social media has influenced children

A UNICEF report cited a 2017 survey which revealed that 92% of Malaysian students aged 13-17 years old had a social media account, while a 2018 survey found that 92% of children aged 5-17 years old use the internet. This points to widespread usage of social media and the internet among Malaysian children and adolescents.

According to **Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail**, "Social media is embedded in the lives of almost every kid these days, and it's easy to see why. Social media platforms have made it easier for children to socialise by providing them with new ways to connect with their friends regardless of where they live. It has developed into a virtual playground for interests, pastimes, and friendships." The consultant paediatrician further adds, "However, there are also challenges that come with social media. For many children, social media is a digital extension of themselves. So, any negative comments in the digital world such as cyberbullying can have effects on the physical self. Such encounters could lower their self-esteem, distort perceptions of their body image and give rise to a range of mental health issues."

The grip that social media has on the minds of children extends beyond just receiving hateful comments online. The Positive Parenting chairman explains "The presence of

online personalities, social media influencers, and ever-evolving online trends have a significant role in influencing a child's social, ethical, intellectual, and even health-related choices. At a young age, children may readily accept what is delivered without the ability to ignore or reject negative content and values." He also adds, "Age restrictions are challenging to enforce, making it easier for young children to access content that is not appropriate for their age. Parents need to be more aware and play an active role in supervising online access by young children. They also need to encourage children to talk about online experiences or content which they find confusing or upsetting." UNICEF reports that when adolescents were asked about what upsets them the most about social media, many revealed distress over the type of content, after encountering violent videos, school fights, accidents, online hoaxes, and misinformation.

## Social media and gadgets: the digital nanny

While digital technology has many useful functions, leaving them in the hands of young children without supervision has its drawbacks. Parents often find it a convenient way to keep children entertained while they attend to other errands like cooking meals, cleaning the house, etc. However, **Dr Zulkifli** warns that when parents increasingly rely on such devices, they unknowingly allow these

"digital nannies" to replace their role as parents: "Children who regularly spend long hours viewing screen devices are missing out on priceless parent-child bonding moments. This can lead to families feeling more disconnected than ever before. Prolonged screen time with reduced parent-child interaction also places children at risk of having delays in their conversational and social interaction skills."

We need to have a balanced view of this issue by looking at online habits of parents as well. Parents are sometimes equally guilty of becoming lost in their devices and spending excessive time on social media. But what's stopping parents and children from simply putting their phones down? The paediatric cardiologist provides an explanation, "In today's technological world, online platforms are designed to capture and hold the attention of viewers across all age groups. The lure and appealing qualities of social media make it difficult for both parents and children to disconnect from their screens. Regular disengagement from social media to strike a balance between the digital and real worlds for both adults and children requires conscious effort. Parents should routinely exercise self-discipline in their own social media consumption besides regulating screen time for their children. They should also ensure that adequate time is allocated for other activities, including those which encourage children to be creative, interact with family members and be more physically active."



## The possible long-term effects of social media on children



As parents, we have seen first-hand how social media usage has spread and impacted our children's lives. It is therefore important for parents to also understand the long-term effects that excessive or improper usage of social media can have on our child's growth and well-being.

**Dr Serena In** draws attention to the issues with mental health that come with excessive social media use. She states, "Excessive usage of social media can serve as a contributing factor for the development of many mental health disorders, especially depression, anxiety, and various behavioural addictions. Children who spend too much time online may also run the risk of being exposed to cyberbullying and

continual social comparisons with others which can cause them to feel inadequate and uncomfortable with themselves."

The clinical psychologist further explains how this can result in body image problems. She adds, "Poor nutrition, weight gain, dental caries, and unhealthy eating behaviours have been associated with the excessive use of social media. Constant screen time can cause people to become less conscious of healthy food options and engage in mindless eating. Furthermore, it can worsen concerns with body image, which is particularly seen in young children and adolescents who may experience difficulties with their own self-worth and resort to unhealthy weight-loss

methods. This happens when they are perpetually exposed to diet fads and extreme weight-loss regimes that may be promoted by others who are obsessed with maintaining the perfect body. This may lead to the development of eating disorders, which is an issue parents need to be aware of."

The clinical psychologist also highlights that behavioural issues are among the long-term negative effects of excessive social media use in children. She explains, "Studies have found that excessive consumption of social media in children is associated with a higher likelihood of behavioural issues such as hyperactivity, inattention, sleep disturbances, and conduct issues."

## What can parents do about it?

Recognising that an excessive use of social media may have negative long-term consequences on the health and well-being of children is an important first step. Next, what can parents do to foster good habits in their children's usage of social media?

According to **Dr Mary Joseph Marret**, "Parents can help by setting clear boundaries and guiding their children towards self-regulation. Most parents recognise the need to set time limits on the duration and specific times when children are permitted to access social media. However, not all parents realise the importance of rules and guidance in relation to children's activities online. They need to strike a balance between providing sufficient freedom to socialise with their friends, while also protecting them from the dangers of social

media and online predators. For younger children, this may involve limiting chat functions with strangers or setting content limits to ensure that they are exposed to age-appropriate content. When children are older, parents should have open discussions about the need to practise self-regulation, protect personal safety and avoid making rude or disrespectful comments and statements."

It is also important for parents to practise open communication and have ongoing talks with their children about social media. The consultant paediatrician says, "Parents should have continuous conversations about social media with their children.

It is essential to foster a home environment and relationship that provides a safe space for children to freely speak about their experiences on social media without fear of being judged. This will encourage children to seek their parents' advice and help when they face difficulties such as cyberbullying or sexual harassment online." Additionally, **Dr Mary** stresses the importance of parents being role models. She states, "Parents must practise what they preach. Setting boundaries for yourself can also teach your child to follow you by example."



# How can parents be more relatable to their children

An effective way to prevent children from using technology and social media excessively or inappropriately is to make an effort to be more engaged and connected with them. This means spending quality time together and providing an environment where your little one feels understood and appreciated.

**Dr Serena** highlights “The relationship between parents and children has changed in the social media age. Children naturally grow apart from their parents as a result of their extensive time spent on gadgets and social media. Therefore, it is critical for parents to make an active effort to foster a closer relationship, by being physically and emotionally available for their child when needed.” In addition to this, **Dr Serena** also underlines building trust between a parent and child in order to have a closer relationship. She states, “When there is mutual trust between a

parent and their child, it helps to build a closer and stronger connection. This makes parents more relatable and relevant, and children begin to feel more comfortable speaking about their thoughts and feelings openly.”

**Dr Mary** agrees with the statement, and further emphasises the importance of proper communication. She explains, “When young

adolescents don't feel under pressure, they are more willing to open up. Their method of communicating can be as simple as making a passing remark about their day. If parents stay open and interested, they are likely to hear more. So, parents should remain engaged and attentive to their child in order to facilitate open communication within the relationship and to be more relatable to them.”



## Conclusion

Ultimately, as parents we must adapt our parenting style to effectively deal with the devices and social media that our children are exposed to. These forms of technology have become “digital nannies” and have replaced the priceless bonding moments between parents and children. Additionally, the potential long-term negative effects such as mental health problems,

body image problems, cyberbullying, and exposure to inappropriate content underline the importance of parents exercising caution when it comes to social media usage in children. Therefore, it is important for parents to establish ground rules around our children's screen time and to have open conversations about their social media usage.

It is also important for parents to be more relatable to their children and to provide a safe environment that is free of judgement, in order for them to feel more at ease and open up when discussing their social media experiences. As the digital world evolves, we as parents need to adapt too. PP



# Pregnancy & Work: A Guide for Expectant Mothers

By **Dr Hoo Mei Lin**, Consultant Obstetrician & Gynaecologist



*Discovering that you are pregnant is a joyous feeling, even if the upcoming journey comes with a unique set of challenges, especially concerning the management of your professional life.*

Striking a balance between work and pregnancy entails several considerations, including workplace precautions, managing pregnancy symptoms and understanding your entitlements regarding maternity leave. With some thoughtful planning, however, you can navigate this exciting time with grace. Here are some points to keep in mind.

First up, **ensuring a comfortable workspace** is essential during pregnancy. Ergonomics play a crucial role, prompting the need for adjustments at your workspace to ensure your comfort. Investing in an appropriate chair, elevating your feet and maintaining good posture can significantly reduce strain on your body.

Taking frequent breaks is equally important, especially if your job requires long periods of sitting or standing. These breaks allow you to stretch and move around, improving circulation and reducing discomfort. Remember to stay well-hydrated and maintain a balanced diet as these are also vital aspects of self-care during pregnancy.

**Managing common pregnancy symptoms** like nausea and stress is another key to a smoother pregnancy. Combatting nausea can be addressed by snacking smart with light, easily digestible options including crackers or

nuts. Incorporating ginger or peppermint tea, or chewing gum, can also help alleviate nausea. In the second and third trimester, compression stockings or socks can improve circulation and help with tired legs as well as swelling at the end of the day.

Additionally, ensuring a fresh and well-ventilated environment contributes to minimising feelings of nausea. Effectively managing stress involves practising deep breathing exercises and, whenever necessary, delegating non-urgent tasks or responsibilities that could contribute to heightened stress levels.

**Informing your HR department** about your pregnancy at an appropriate time is also crucial, typically during the second trimester when you have settled into your pregnancy. Familiarising yourself with your company's policies related to maternity leave, benefits and workplace support for expectant mothers ensures you are well-informed about your rights.

In Malaysia, female employees are entitled to paid maternity leave for 98 days according to the Employment (Amendment) Act 2022. Employees can choose to work right up until the day they give birth or commence maternity leave 30 days before their expected confinement (supported by a doctor's letter

confirming their due date). Once you've informed HR, you can start making concrete plans about when you'll go on leave.

**Incorporating fun elements** into your pregnancy journey can further enhance this special time. Documenting your pregnancy journey through a journal or weekly bump photos allows you to track your growth and create beautiful memories. Embracing your changing body and indulging in maternity clothes and comfortable shoes that make you feel good at work are also important. Office baby showers and pampering sessions, like a prenatal spa day or gentle pregnancy-friendly workouts, could further add an element of joy and relaxation during this transformative time.

Balancing pregnancy and work is indeed a remarkable feat. By understanding your rights, fostering effective communication at your workplace and prioritising self-care, you can embark on this journey joyfully. Each passing day brings you closer to meeting your little one, making this time truly precious amidst the professional hustle and bustle. PP

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# Navigating Life as The Sandwich Generation

By **Mr Alexis Cheang**, Behavioural Psychologist



*In the hustle and bustle of modern life, many adults find themselves sandwiched between the responsibilities of caring for their aging parents and raising their own young children. The delicate balance between caregiving, parenting, work and personal time is a challenge faced by a growing number of individuals globally. This population is aptly named the Sandwich Generation.*

This demographic faces unique challenges, including financial strain, time management, emotional stress and the expectations of meeting the diverse needs of two very different generations. Understanding the scope of this challenge is the first step in finding effective solutions.

Most Malaysians have grown up in a culture that promotes filial piety, and it is quite common for extended family members to live together under one roof. In fact, the Fifth Malaysian Population and Family Survey by the National Population and Family Development Board Malaysia says that **70% of elderly Malaysians stay with their children or extended family members.**

While it is common, this doesn't mean there aren't hurdles to overcome. The Sandwich Generation nonetheless finds considerable pressure on its finances and time, necessitating careful planning and thoughtful strategies.

If you find yourself in this precarious position, here are some practical tips to help you navigate this demanding journey.

- **Practise open communication and planning:**

Effective communication with both generations is crucial. Sit down with your family members to discuss expectations, roles and responsibilities. Create a schedule that allocates time for caregiving, parenting, work and personal activities. Adjustments will be needed, so be flexible and open to change.

- **Delegate responsibilities:**

Share caregiving duties with other family members, if possible. Divide tasks based on each individual's strengths and availability. This lightens the load and allows for a more manageable caregiving plan. Your spouse, siblings, parents, children, nieces, nephews and friends can also help with meals, errands, or by assisting with other chores.

- **Utilise support services:**

Explore community resources, such as home health care, meal delivery services, or adult day care programmes



for your aging parents. Seek local support groups or online communities where you can connect with others in similar situations and share experiences, as well as gain insights.

- **Financial planning:** Work with a financial advisor to plan for the costs associated with caring for both your parents and your children. This could involve setting up budgets, exploring insurance options and considering long-term care plans.

- **Prioritise self-care:**

Make time for self-care and personal interests. It is vital to recharge physically and emotionally to provide the best care for your loved ones. Even small moments of self-care, like reading a book or going for a walk, can make a big difference.

- **Give and receive support:**

Being a supportive partner is key to working through challenges together. This means taking turns to assume the various responsibilities and being a reliable partner to count on provides assurance that tasks can still be taken care of when there are times you or your partner need to focus on other things.

- **Maintain a healthy work-life balance:**

Discuss flexible work arrangements with your employer if you can. Remote work, flexible hours, or reduced schedules can help you better manage your caregiving and parenting responsibilities without having to compromise your job performance.

Being part of the Sandwich Generation can be challenging, but it's also possible to strike a balance that meets the needs of all family members. Remember to seek support from community resources, friends and family to make this journey a little smoother. Take it one step at a time and know that you're doing your best in a demanding situation. PP

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# Every Step Together

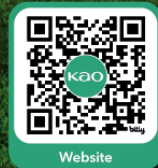
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# The Beauty in Simplicity

*Adapting to a simpler and gentler way of living that supports a healthy and more sustainable lifestyle*



*Kirei* is a Japanese word that generally denotes cleanliness, beauty and simplicity. Kao has incorporated the philosophy of *Kirei* to encourage consumer lifestyle changes that support holistic living in the current millennium. The concept is encapsulated in its manufacturing practices that incorporate measures to deliver value-added products that help improve people's lives, help consumers realise fulfilling lifestyles, and promote a clean, organised and beautiful life at various life stages.

## Keeping living spaces clean

According to the *Kirei* Lifestyle Plan, a clean and serene environment sustains living, and life. Besides enhancing home comforts, a clean living area is crucial in preventing many infectious ills. Keeping living spaces clean can prevent the growth of harmful pathogens.

The omnipresent COVID-19 has driven home the message that

germs can linger on surfaces and be passed on to the uninfected, causing harm and illness. Other pathogens include *Salmonella*, which thrives in dirty living areas, especially the kitchen, and can cause food poisoning-related illnesses. Dirty living areas, especially damp, dirty areas (such as bathroom, toilet), can see a proliferation of mould, which can precipitate respiratory infections.

There are just too many microscopic menaces that thrive in dirty environments, and it is just common sense that we keep our living spaces clean and uncluttered, not just for aesthetic reasons, but also for good health and mental wellbeing.

## Rest and relaxation

A clean and comfortable home is crucial to creating a relaxing environment. A place to destress is important, especially for those who are constantly stressed due to the

demands of work and even personal lives.

Stress elevates cortisol, a hormone that regulates various functions in the body. In small amounts, it allows the body to handle demands placed on it. However, prolonged elevated levels of cortisol (often associated with chronic stress) can adversely affect the body, mentally and physically.

Prolonged cortisol elevation weakens the immune system and is linked to high blood pressure. Other effects include weight gain, digestive disruptions, sleep disturbances, mood disorders as well as hormonal imbalances. As you can see, chronic stress can be a silent killer, so it is imperative that our lives be as "stress deficient" as possible, and what better way to deal with stress than by adopting the *Kirei* Lifestyle Plan by looking for easy, fuss-free home cleaning solutions that cater to one's needs.

## Cleanliness translates to good health

Personal cleanliness is a crucial factor in the *Kirei* Lifestyle Plan, and in any lifestyle that aims to foster good health. Good personal hygiene helps prevent the spread of many diseases, not only for you, but also those living with you.

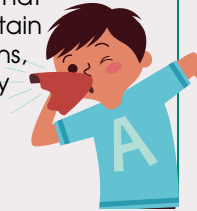
### Wash your hands:

This is a simple and effective way to curb the spread of infectious diseases. Regular handwashing removes germs that are almost always present on the hands.



### Practise respiratory hygiene:

When coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose. Either use tissues or the crook of your elbow as cover. This minimises the spread of respiratory droplets that may contain pathogens, especially in those who are ill.



### Shower regularly:

This is a given as showers remove dirt, sweat, grime and bacteria, reducing the possibility of skin infections and other problems.

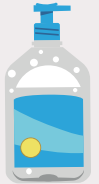


### Ensure food safety:

Good hygiene during all aspects of food preparation helps prevent foodborne illnesses.



Use **effective products** that could disinfect or prevent bacterial growth.



It is undeniable that personal and home/environmental hygiene is the cornerstone of good public health. Such practices reduce the transmission of infectious diseases and promote overall wellbeing.

## All in the family

No man is an island, and most of us live with family members. It could be a young family, a family with teenagers, or families with infants, teenagers and the elderly. Whatever our situation, we strive to keep the family healthy and happy. To do this, we have to make choices every single day. From the detergent we use to what type of floor cleaner we purchase, we have to make a multitude of choices every single day.

Some of the decisions appear to be simple ones at first glance. Take for example, diapers for babies. But if you think about it, there are so many factors to consider when you go shopping for diapers. You need to look at: size, absorbency, type, comfort, waist and leg fit, hypoallergenic, cost, etc. Just this simple decision requires consideration of multiple factors.



Take another example. Your teenager is going through that certain phase. Acne erupts and self-esteem implodes. You need anti-acne lotions or facial cleansers, but you cannot simply grab anything from the pharmacy. Now, another list of things to consider: skin type, ingredients, gentleness, consistency, SPF protection, acne type... It's not as simple as it appears to be.

## A lifestyle that nurtures

To help us with the choices we have to make every day, we need to adopt a lifestyle that

allows us to nurture our families as well as the environment. The beauty of the *Kirei* Lifestyle Plan lies in its philosophy of encouraging happy, healthy living while making choices that factor in sustainability and accountability, for what we enjoy in life now should also be enjoyed by future generations – our children, and their children as well. It is not only about Me, but also society at large. PP



# Understanding COVID-19 & SARS-CoV-2 Variants

By **Dato' Dr Musa Mohd Nordin**, Consultant Paediatrician & Neonatologist



*Over the past few years following the COVID-19 pandemic, you may have heard of terms like variants, subvariants, Alpha, Beta, Delta, Omicron, or more recently, Arcturus, Eris and Pirola. But do you know what they mean and how they can help us understand the virus and mitigate the pandemic?*

## What are variants?

Viruses tend to evolve as they spread between people. This is due to changes in the genetic code that occur during the genome replication, which can be caused by genetic mutations or viral recombination.

Most genetic changes do not affect the properties of the virus. However, some changes may alter certain critical properties, such as the rate of transmission, the severity of disease symptoms, the viral evasion of vaccines and the resistance built against medicines. When a virus undergoes significant changes

due to one or more mutations that make it different from the original virus, it is known as a 'variant'.

## Varieties of variants

During the pandemic, SARS-CoV-2 variants with shared attributes and characteristics can be classified into these categories based on their evaluated risks:

- **Variants under monitoring (VUM):** A variant with genetic changes that are suspected to affect viral features, showing early indicators of growth advantage relative to other circulating variants, but the

evidence of its impact on a larger scale remains unclear, and enhanced monitoring and reassessment with new evidence are required.

- **Variants of interest (VOIs):**

A variant with genetic changes that are predicted or known to affect viral features (e.g. transmissibility, virulence, antibody evasion, susceptibility to therapeutics) and known to have a growth advantage over other circulating variants in multiple regions, with increasing prevalence and number of cases over time or other impacts that suggest a growing risk to global public health.

• **Variants of concern (VOCs):**

A variant that meets the definition of a VOI and fulfils at least one of the following criteria when compared with other variants:

- Significant increase in disease severity
- Change in COVID-19 epidemiology that severely affect the ability of health systems to provide care to patients, thus requiring major public health interventions
- Significant decrease in vaccine effectiveness against severe disease

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, SARS-CoV-2 has continued to mutate and many variants have been identified globally. In May 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) began assigning labels using Greek letters to both VOCs and VOIs to make it easier for the public to discuss and refer to significant SARS-CoV-2 variants.

Here are some of the key variants:

• **Alpha (B.1.1.7):** It was the first highly publicised variant labelled using Greek letters. The variant was first reported in the United Kingdom in November 2020. Studies suggested that the variant was 40-80% more transmissible than the original virus. It was the predominant variant before the rise of the more aggressive Delta variant.

• **Delta (B.1.617.2):** This variant was first detected in India in October 2020. It became the predominant variant until Omicron took its place in mid-December 2021. Studies estimated that Delta caused more than twice as many infections as previous variants.



• **Omicron (B.1.1.529) and subvariants:**

The original Omicron variant was first detected in Botswana and reported in South Africa in November 2021. The variant quickly began to appear and multiply in other countries, making it the predominant circulating variant globally by the end of 2021. In 2022 and 2023, it generated several subvariants, e.g. BA.2.75 (nicknamed "Centaurus"), XBB.1.16 (nickname "Arcturus"), EG.5 (nicknamed "Eris") and BA.2.86 (nicknamed "Pirola"). The Omicron variants account for over 98% of the publicly available sequences since February 2022, thus new SARS-CoV-2 variants will likely emerge from these variants.

of COVID-19. The currently available vaccines are expected to provide at least some protection against new variants because vaccines are typically created to produce a broad immune response. Hence, changes in the viral genome should not make vaccines entirely ineffective. It is also possible to modify the vaccine composition to protect against these newer variants. Scientists, researchers and health officials are also working together to understand how these variants influence the traits of the virus and the vaccine effectiveness, and how the vaccine can be improved and updated.

In the meantime, prevention is still the best protection against COVID-19. Apart from the standard preventive measures like good hygiene and respiratory etiquette, a booster dose is recommended for high-risk groups 6-12 months after the previous dose. Up-to-date vaccination, including booster doses, can reduce the risk of severe illness, hospitalisation, and death. Consult your healthcare provider to learn more about the COVID-19 booster dose and how you can get it. PP

## Variants and vaccination

The diversity of SARS-CoV-2 variants complicates our effort in controlling COVID-19, even though multiple vaccines have been produced and distributed around the world. According to studies, some variants are more resistant to the vaccines and can evade the immune response. This could be a possible explanation for how reinfection can occur in people who have recovered from COVID-19 or have been vaccinated.

Even with the emergence of new variants, the good news is vaccinations can still protect us from the worse consequences

An educational contribution by





Vaccines confer protection for the disease they cover. Since their introduction, vaccines have helped save many lives by protecting the young and old against potentially life-threatening diseases.



# Why Does My Child Need to Take So Many Doses of the Same Vaccine?

By **Dr Yong Junina Fadzil**, Consultant Paediatrician & Paediatric Cardiologist

## National Immunisation Schedule for Children

Vaccine	Age (Months)												Age (Years)			
	Birth	1	2	3	4	5	6	9	12	15	18	21	7	13	15	
BCG	█															
Hepatitis B	█															
Diphtheria-Tetanus-Pertussis-Polio-Hepatitis B - <i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> type b (DTaP-IPV-HepB-Hib)			█	█		█						█				
Pneumococcal					█		█			█						
Measles (only in Sabah)							█									
Measles - Mumps - Rubella (MMR)								█	█							
Japanese Encephalitis (JE) (only in Sarawak)								█				█				
Diphtheria - Tetanus (DT)													█			
Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)														█		
Tetanus (ATT)																█

## Why do we need multiple doses?

A peek into a child's vaccination booklet will reveal the need for multiple doses for vaccines such as the DTaP/IPV/HepB/HiB, while only one dose of BCG is required. On the other hand, one needs to take the influenza vaccine annually. Why do some vaccines require multiple dosing, some require annual shots, while some are only given once?

To better understand this, let's have a look at how vaccines work. Vaccines comprise bits and pieces of bacteria or viruses, which, when injected or ingested, will trigger the recipient's immune system to produce antibodies. However, in young babies, one dose may not produce a high enough level of antibodies, or the antibodies may not last long. In order to generate a sufficiently high level of antibodies and for these antibodies to last longer, multiple doses are given. These

doses are timed such that it pushes the antibodies to a higher level.

Examples of vaccines that require multiple dosing in infancy, and booster doses are:

- **Diphtheria/Tetanus/ Pertussis/IPV/Hepatitis B/ HiB (hexavalent vaccine)** – given at 2, 3 and 5 months as the primary series, and 18 months as a booster dose
- **Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR)** – given at 9 and 12 months
- **Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV)** – given at 4 and 6 months as the primary series, and 15 months as a booster dose

## Why do we need to take the influenza vaccine every year?

On the other hand, influenza vaccine needs to be administered annually. Why is

this the case? Wouldn't one dose suffice?

The influenza virus comprises several strains, of which two strains affect humans. These are Influenza A and B. Within these strains are several subtypes, and they mutate regularly. A vaccine for a particular subtype, like H1N1, for example, will not confer protection to other subtypes. In order to be protected, a person needs to get the latest vaccine. In addition, the antibody levels start to drop towards the end of a year and is no longer sufficient to confer protection.

The current influenza vaccines in the market are what is called quadrivalent vaccines. They comprise two strains of Influenza A and two strains of Influenza B. The strains in the vaccine is determined by experts based on their observations and predictions.

## Who should take the influenza vaccine?

The influenza vaccine can be given as early as 6 months old. Ideally, everyone should take their annual influenza shots. Some groups are at higher risk of getting severe influenza infection. They are:



Individuals with chronic medical conditions, e.g. diabetes, asthma, chronic lung disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease



Pregnant women



Children under the age of 5 years



Family members who live with young babies and other vulnerable individuals who may not be able to take the vaccine



Healthcare workers



Adults over 65 years of age

Do ask your doctor about the annual influenza vaccine. It could save your life and that of others. PP

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# Liver Diseases in Children



*As parents, it is essential to be aware of the diseases that can affect our children; this includes conditions that affect the liver. Understanding these diseases is often the first step parents can take to ensure their children receive the best care and support for their growth and well-being.*

## The mighty functions of the liver

Many are aware of the liver's detoxification role, where it removes toxins and waste from our blood. The waste eventually leaves the body through our urine.<sup>1</sup> However, many are unaware that the liver is known to have over 500 distinct roles in our body.<sup>1</sup> Here is an overview of the key functions of the liver:

### Summary of the Key Functions of the Liver<sup>1</sup>

- Aids digestion through the production of bile – a fluid that helps break down and absorb nutrients (e.g. fats, vitamins, etc.)
- Storage of energy in the form of sugar
- Storage of vitamins and minerals (e.g. vitamin A, D, E, K, and B12)
- Production of proteins (e.g. blood clotting proteins, hormones, etc.)
- Protection against infections

## Different types of liver diseases in children

The liver is the second largest organ in the human body, and much like other organs, it is susceptible to a range of different diseases.<sup>2</sup> Examples of liver diseases in children include:

- **Acute Liver Failure** – A sudden and rapid loss of ability to function, usually in a matter of days.<sup>2</sup> It can occur to children of any age, and can be caused by viral infections, genetic diseases of the liver, exposure

to certain environmental toxins (e.g. wild mushrooms, insecticides, etc.), and certain medications.<sup>3</sup>

- **Viral Hepatitis** – Inflammation of the liver caused by a viral infection (e.g. hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E viruses).<sup>2</sup> The different types of viral hepatitis are categorised based on the type of infecting hepatitis virus, which all have their own distinct clinical implications. For example, hepatitis A can cause diarrhoea, vomiting, and abdominal pain in children.<sup>4</sup> Hepatitis B, on the other hand, can lead to a chronic condition that



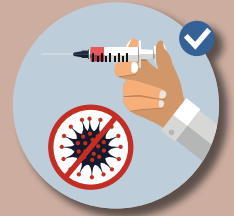
## Prevention of liver diseases in children

The prevention of liver diseases depends on the cause. Here are some tips to prevent liver diseases in children:

can result in permanent scarring of the liver, liver failure, or even liver cancer.<sup>5</sup>

- **Genetic diseases** – Certain genetic diseases, such as Alagille syndrome, Crigler-Najjar syndrome, glycogen storage disease type 1, and many more, can affect the liver.<sup>6</sup> These genetic conditions can disrupt the normal function of the liver.
- **Non-alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD)** – A common chronic liver disease in children which results from an excessive build-up of fat in the liver.<sup>6</sup> Over time, this can develop into Non-alcoholic Steatohepatitis (NASH), which can cause inflammation and damage to the liver.<sup>7</sup>

- **Consider getting vaccinated.** Certain infectious causes of liver disease (e.g. hepatitis A and B) can be prevented through vaccinations.<sup>8</sup> Hepatitis vaccines are available separately (hepatitis A or B vaccine) or as a combination (hepatitis A and B vaccine). Speak with your doctor to learn more about hepatitis vaccines in children.<sup>9</sup>



- **Practice general hygiene measures.** The spread of infections, including those that cause hepatitis, can be reduced by taking certain measures like washing your hands regularly, avoiding the ingestion of contaminated water/food, etc.<sup>8</sup>



- **Ensure healthy nutrition.** As obesity is a known risk factor for non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), ensuring healthy nutrition can help prevent its development. This includes eating a balanced, moderate, and varied diet that includes plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>8</sup>



- **Ensure a healthy and active lifestyle.** In addition to healthy nutrition, it is also important to ensure that your child gets regular exercise and sufficient sleep at night. This can help to maintain a healthy body weight and stave off NAFLD.<sup>8</sup>



## Conclusion

Parents should ensure a good understanding of the various liver diseases that can affect children. By being aware of the risks and taking preventive measures, parents can play an active role in protecting their little ones from liver-related health issues.

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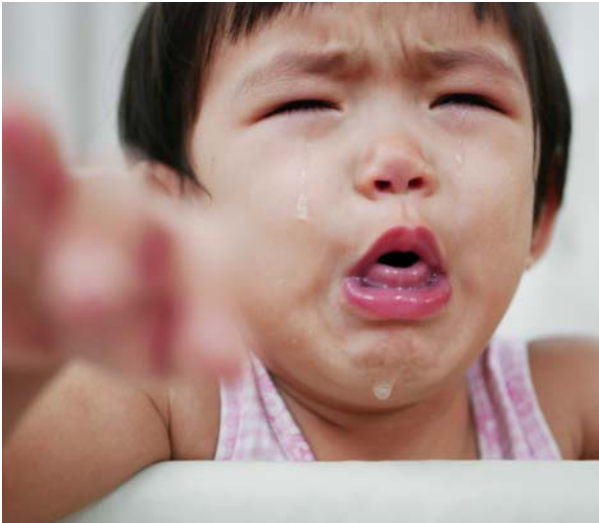


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*Coughs in children are not unusual. In fact, as parents, we tend to brush them off as no big deal. However, not all coughs are equal. Some may actually be a sign of a more serious issue. Therefore, it is important for parents to understand the different types of coughs in children.*

# Not Just A Mild Cough

## What are the different types of coughs and their causes in children?

- **Productive (wet) coughs** – When a child coughs up a thick and sticky fluid (mucus). In some cases, the mucus may be green or yellow in colour, which may be a sign of a respiratory infection (e.g. common cold, influenza, etc.).<sup>1</sup>
- **‘Barky’ coughs** – Often described as a harsh “seal-like barking” sound, “barky” coughs are known to be a symptom of a condition

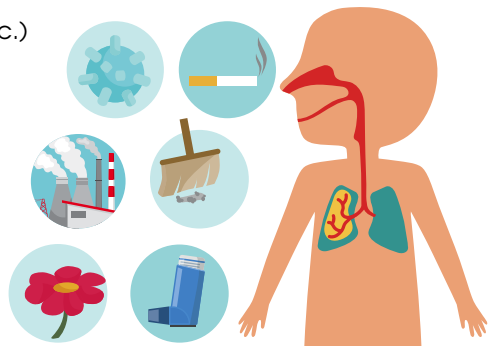
known as croup. This happens as a result of an inflammation of the upper airways, often accompanied by a hoarse voice and high-pitched squeak sound when breathing.<sup>2</sup> In the majority of cases, croup can be caused by viral infections.<sup>3</sup>

- **Coughs with wheezing** – Characterised by a high-pitched whistling sound, most noticeable when breathing out and is often caused by a constriction of the airways (e.g. viral bronchiolitis, asthma, etc.).<sup>3,4</sup> Wheezing coughs may also be caused by a blockage in the airways due to a foreign object.<sup>4</sup>

- **Lasting coughs** – Coughs that last a long period of time (i.e. multiple weeks) can be a sign of a viral infection.<sup>2</sup> Other causes may include asthma, allergies, or chronic conditions that affect the respiratory system.<sup>1,2</sup>
- **‘Whooping’ coughs** – Episodes of short and fast-paced coughs accompanied with a “whooping” sound when the child breathes in.<sup>1,5</sup> It is caused by a vaccine-preventable disease called pertussis, which can cause breathing difficulties in young children.<sup>1</sup>

### Summary of Common Causes of Coughs in Children<sup>6</sup>

- Respiratory tract infections (bacterial, viral, etc.)
- Pneumococcal disease
- Allergies
- Asthma
- Gastroesophageal reflux (GER)
- Environmental irritant (e.g. cold air, second-hand smoke, pollution, etc.)
- Ingestion of foreign objects
- Issues with swallowing or structural problems with the windpipe



## When should parents worry about coughing in their child?

Coughing can be serious. Speak to your doctor if your child has coughing alongside any of the following symptoms<sup>1,2</sup>:

A high fever (greater than 38°C)



Excessive crankiness or sleepiness

Blue coloured lips, face, or tongue



Coughing blood

Difficulty breathing (e.g. fast breathing, shortness of breath, etc.)



Dehydration (e.g. dizziness, dry mouth, sunken eyes, peeing less often, etc.)

A “whooping” sound when breathing in after coughing



## Preventing coughs in children

Coughs are a non-specific symptom that can happen in many different conditions in children. As such, the prevention of coughs is dependent on the cause. Nevertheless, here are some general tips to prevent coughs in children:

- **Practise good hygiene.** This can include things like regular hand washing with soap and avoiding touching your face with your hands. This can help prevent the spread of infections that can cause coughs.<sup>6</sup>
- **Stay up to date with immunisations.** Certain infectious diseases that cause coughs in children can be prevented through vaccinations.<sup>6</sup> For example, whooping cough can be prevented by ensuring that young children take the Diphtheria Tetanus Pertussis (DTaP) vaccine.<sup>7</sup> In addition to this, pregnant mothers can take the Tetanus Diphtheria Pertussis (Tdap) vaccine to provide protection to their newborn.<sup>7</sup> Other examples of vaccine-preventable diseases include pneumococcal disease and influenza.<sup>6</sup>
- **Stick to an asthma/allergy action plan.** If the cause of coughing is due to asthma or allergies, it is important for parents to consult with a healthcare professional to determine an action plan. This can help reduce the severity and frequency of coughs.<sup>6</sup>
- **Remove choking hazards.** Avoid providing your child with any foreign objects that pose a potential choking hazard.<sup>6</sup> For example, coins, plastic toys, product packaging, etc.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it's crucial for parents to realise that a child's cough can signal serious problems. By knowing the different types and taking preventive steps, we can protect our children's health. Being informed and proactive is our best defence. PP

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# Safe and Happy Trips with My Little Traveller

By **Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail**, Consultant Paediatrician & Paediatric Cardiologist

*Travelling with babies and young children presents both unique challenges and immense joy to families. Here are some essential insights to aid parents in preparing for your adventures while prioritising your children's health and well-being.*

## Medical concerns

Before travelling, consult your doctor for vaccination recommendations for your little ones and other family members. Ensure your children are up to date with routine immunisations and consider other recommended vaccines based on your destination. Some regions require specific vaccines to protect against diseases that might not be prevalent here in Malaysia.

### Examples of recommended vaccines for travelling

- Influenza vaccine
- Meningococcal vaccine
- Yellow fever vaccine
- Rotavirus vaccine
- Cholera vaccine
- Typhoid vaccine
- Hepatitis A vaccine



## Transportation considerations

You should also make it a point to research medical facilities at your destination. Having a list of reputable paediatricians or clinics can be invaluable in case of illness or emergencies. Also, don't forget to invest in comprehensive travel insurance that covers your family's healthcare needs abroad to safeguard against unexpected medical expenses.

Make a list of all the crucial items you need to pack such as prescription medications, first-aid supplies, baby wipes and a digital thermometer. Having these essentials on hand will not only be convenient but provide peace of mind.

When you get to your destination, do consider baby-proofing the space by removing potential hazards and taping down cords.

### A note for pregnant/breastfeeding mums:

If you're travelling during pregnancy or while breastfeeding, you are also recommended to get certain vaccinations (e.g. Tdap, influenza vaccines). Apart from protecting yourself, this can provide passive immunity to your baby too. Get your doctor's advice on the suitable vaccines.

Choosing the right mode of transportation is crucial when travelling with babies and young children. Consider the length of the journey and the comfort and safety of your child. When flying, book flights during your child's usual nap times to increase the likelihood of a peaceful journey. Request bulkhead seats with a bassinet attachment for infants.

For road trips, plan frequent stops for diaper changes, feeding and stretching. Ensure your child's car seat is properly installed and appropriate for their age and weight. Consider bringing a lightweight stroller that's easy to manoeuvre.

When travelling by train or bus, enquire about family-friendly facilities and seating arrangements. Double-check if they have changing stations and space to accommodate strollers.

Regardless of the mode of transportation, always have a well-packed diaper bag within easy reach. Include diapers, wipes, a change of clothes, snacks and any comforting items like a favourite blanket. Be sure to include a selection of age-appropriate travel toys, colouring books and puzzles to keep your child entertained and a variety of healthy snacks and drinks that your child enjoys.



## Fun tips

But don't let all that serious stuff prevent you from anticipating a fantastic trip. Travelling provides a wealth of sensory experiences for your child. Think about all the things they will be able to do while on holiday: touch sand on the beach, listen to the sounds of nature and explore new tastes through different cuisines!

Encourage your young child to document their travels through drawings, photos, or simple journal entries. It's a wonderful way to capture memories and

foster creativity. And have fun coming up with an activity-packed itinerary including visits to child-friendly museums, parks and cultural sites.

Above all, remember that flexibility is key when travelling with young children. Be prepared for detours, tantrums and changing plans at the last minute. Embrace the unpredictability of the journey and find joy in the unexpected!

Travelling with babies and young children certainly has

its challenges, but it's also an opportunity for growth, bonding and exploration. With the right planning and precautions, you can ensure their health and safety while creating beautiful memories as a family. So, pack your bags and watch your little traveller embrace the world with wonder and curiosity. PP

An educational contribution by



Malaysian Paediatric Association



Take no chances on health.  
**CHOOSE TO  
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With travelling comes lots of fun and excitement. But there are still travel-related diseases out there such as JE, rabies, hepatitis A and typhoid. They can be life-threatening. Travel safe without leaving your health to chance. Ask your doctor on how you can stay safe and still have fun throughout your travels.

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# Prediabetes: Prevent Diabetes Before It's Too Late!

By **Prof Dr Muhammad Yazid Jalaludin**, Senior Consultant Paediatric Endocrinologist



*Diabetes mellitus is one of the most concerning health issues globally. In Malaysia, the prevalence of diabetes among adults has been increasing steadily from 11.2% in 2011 to 13.4% in 2015 and 18.3% in 2019. One of the major precursors of diabetes is prediabetes. But not many are aware of this condition, especially in children.*

## What is prediabetes?

Prediabetes is a condition in which blood sugar levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be considered as diabetes. It happens when the body is not responding well to insulin, resulting in a build-up of sugar in the blood.

Individuals with prediabetes have a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes and other non-communicable diseases, like heart disease and stroke. A 2022 systematic review of studies from 1995 to 2021 estimated that the **prevalence of prediabetes among Malaysian adults was 11.62%**.

## What are the symptoms?

Prediabetes typically shows no clear symptoms. When symptoms appear, it is usually a sign that it has progressed to type 2 diabetes. Here are some common symptoms:

Symptoms	Prediabetes	Diabetes
Acanthosis nigricans (skin darkening on certain body parts, e.g. neck, elbows, knees)	Yes	Yes
Increased urination	No	Yes
Increased thirst/hunger	No	Yes
Blurry vision	No	Yes
More infections	No	Yes

Examples of acanthosis nigricans in children, a sign of prediabetes and diabetes



## What are the risk factors among children?

Consider checking your child's blood sugar levels if they have these risk factors:

- Overweight or obesity
- Family history of type 2 diabetes
- Physical inactivity
- Polycystic ovary syndrome



## How to diagnose prediabetes?

Similar blood sugar tests are used to diagnose prediabetes and diabetes

Tests	Normal	Prediabetes	Diabetes
Fasting blood glucose (mmol/L)	<5.6	5.6-6.9	≥7.0
Oral glucose tolerance test (mmol/L)	<7.8	7.8-11.0	≥11.1
Haemoglobin A1c (%)	<5.7	5.7-6.4	≥6.5

Reference: ISPAD Clinical Practice Consensus Guidelines 2022: Type 2 diabetes in children and adolescents

## What can be done?

The good news is that prediabetes is reversible, unlike diabetes. By practising these measures, diabetes can be prevented or delayed:



### • Ensure good eating habits.

Feed your child a balanced diet and reduce sugar, salt and processed foods. As children are still growing up, dietary adjustments should be focused on healthy food choices rather than portion control only.



### • Encourage physical activity.

At least 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity per day is recommended.



### • Aim for or maintain a healthy weight.

Overweight and obesity are among the risk factors.



### • Limit screen time.

Recreational screen time should be limited to no more than one hour a day for children between two and five years old, and no more than two hours a day for children aged six years and older.



### • Get enough sleep.

Toddlers (3-5 years old) should have 10-13 hours of sleep including naps, while school children (6-13 years old) should have 9-11 hours of sleep.

Reference: Clinical Practice Guidelines – Management of Obesity 2nd Edition (2023)

Prediabetes may not be easily noticeable, especially among children, since we often assume that diabetes and related health conditions only happen to adults. But it is a key contributor to the increasing rate of diabetes globally. Fortunately, with early intervention, prediabetes can be reversed and diabetes can be avoided. PP

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# Mother's Milk: The Best Food for Newborns

By **Ms Wong Hui Juan**, Nutritionist & Member of Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM)



*Breast milk is often recommended as the best source of nutrition for newborns by healthcare professional. However, new mothers often wonder, what exactly makes breast milk so nourishing for newborns?*

## Nutritional content of breast milk for newborns

Breast milk contains a diverse array of nutrients for newborns. Here is a quick look at the different components it contains, and their benefits for newborns.

- **Water.** A source of water for newborns and maintains their hydration.
- **Proteins.** Important for physical development as it is used to build, strengthen, and repair body tissues. Specific proteins (e.g. lactoferrin, lysozyme, and bifidus factor) contribute to iron transport, healthy gut flora, and the overall well-being of the newborn.
- **Fats.** Facilitates the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins, acts as a primary source of energy, and supports the development of the brain, retina, and nervous system. Breast milk contains all the necessary lipids needed to support the initial six months of a newborn's life.
- **Carbohydrates.** Lactose is a type of sugar and is the main carbohydrate found in breast milk. It provides newborns with another source of energy, aids the absorption of minerals (e.g. calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, etc.), and promotes the growth of healthy gut bacteria.
- **Vitamins.** Contains fat-soluble vitamins (e.g. A, D, E, and K)

and water-soluble vitamins (C, B2, B3, and B5), and helps to safeguard newborns against nutrient deficiencies and malnutrition. It is important to note that the amount of these vitamins available in breast milk depends on the vitamin intake from the mother.

- **Minerals.** Contains a range of different minerals (e.g. iron, zinc, calcium, sodium, magnesium, selenium, etc.) that contribute to building strong bones, producing red blood cells, and promoting muscle and nerve function.

## Breast milk and immunity

Breast milk also enhances your baby's immune system. After childbirth, the "first milk" (called the colostrum) is especially rich with nutrients and antibodies that help protect your baby from potentially dangerous infections. Even as your baby grows, breast milk continues to provide essential antibodies and nutrients that facilitate the growth of good bacteria, which help to lower the risk of infections.

## Beyond nutrition & immunity: the other benefits of breast milk

Apart from being rich in nutrients and enhancing immunity, there are many other benefits of breast milk.

- **Self-adjusting.** As your child grows and develops, so does

your breast milk. It has the ability to adjust according to your child's requirements, tailoring itself to meet their changing needs.

- **Secure food source.** Breast milk is a dependable and safe source of nourishment for newborns, unaffected by factors like power availability or access to clean water.
- **Contains other beneficial components.** Breast milk is known to also contain hormones which influence growth and development. It also contains enzymes which help to aid the digestion and absorption of nutrients.
- **Environmentally friendly.** Breast milk does not require any packaging or transportation. It also leaves zero waste, making it an eco-friendly choice.

## Conclusion

Breast milk is the optimal choice for feeding your newborn because it gives them the best nutrition, boosts their immune system, and comes with many other benefits. As such, it is recommended to exclusively breastfeed your baby for the first six months. After that, you can keep breastfeeding while starting complementary feeding until your child is two years old.

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谢谢 Terima  
நன்றி Kasih

Child Development

Thank You  
Arigatō



# Raising a Multilingual Child

By **Dr Norazlin Kamal Nor**, Consultant Developmental Paediatrician

*In the current world where cultural diversity is ever growing and in fact becoming the norm, the number of children who are multilingual have increased. It is not surprising that in a country like Malaysia, with its rich and diverse multicultural society, children who speak two, three, or even four languages every day is not an uncommon occurrence. So, how can parents nurture, support and raise a multilingual child?*

## Benefits of being multilingual

Studies on the benefits of raising a multilingual child have frequently reported positive effects. Speaking more than one language regularly is associated with various cognitive benefits such as improved literacy and language skills, memory, creativity, and problem-solving skills. In addition to this, multilingualism is also associated with improved communication skills (e.g. writing, reading, comprehension, listening, and speaking). Being multilingual can also provide new travel, education, and career opportunities in the future and promotes better cultural awareness in children.

## Tips to raising a multilingual child

- **Start early.** Learning a new language is more effective at a younger age than it is later on in life. Therefore, it is important to expose new languages at an early age.
- **Promote immersion.** Encourage your child to take part in activities that exposes them to different languages. For example, attending cultural events

or consuming media (e.g. movies, music, TV shows, books, etc.) in a different language. However, keep in mind to limit exposure of very young children, especially those below two years, to screentime. In older children, the number of screentime hours should also be monitored and regulated.

- **Make language learning fun.** Incorporate language learning in different family activities. This can include games, songs, etc. It is important for parents to avoid pressuring their child to learn multiple languages, and imparting knowledge in a fun way enhances positive learning experiences.

- **Create a multilingual environment at home.** Although the Malaysian society is generally multilingual, it may still be useful for parents to also speak different languages at home. This creates an environment that consistently exposes your child to different languages.

## Frequently asked questions

*“When is the best time for children to pick up a language?”*

Generally, the ideal time for a child to pick up a new language is before the age of 10. This is because the human brain is most adaptable during critical developmental windows in early life. Children initially form



neural connections earlier in life, followed by pruning of these connections. Brain connections that are used more frequently are strengthened and maintained. Thus, exposure to consistent and good language learning strategies at a young age enable grammatical rules and pronunciation of new languages to be learnt earlier and easier.

*“Is it better for my child to learn different languages simultaneously or separately?”*

Teaching children different languages can be done at the same time (simultaneous acquisition) or separately (sequential acquisition). There is no “best method”, as it depends on numerous factors such as age, language environment, cognitive development, consistency and exposure to the languages, etc. In most cases, families opt for a combination of both approaches.

*“Does learning multiple languages cause language delay?”*

This is a common misconception – learning a different language during childhood does not cause language delay. In the case of a bilingual child, while the individual vocabularies in each language might be less extensive than usual, the combined vocabulary (comprising both languages) is comparable to that of a child who has learned only a single language.

There are caveats to this recommendation in children who have been identified with speech delay by a medical practitioner. In these children, there may be benefit in concentrating on acquisition and mastery of one language first, although the appropriate strategy for these children should be discussed with their medical practitioner and therapists working with the child and family.

In Malaysia, being able to speak multiple languages is part of our day-to-day routine. Therefore, it is important for parents to be actively involved in helping their child learn new languages. This way, you’re not only giving your child a special gift of learning a new language, but also helping them become better at communicating with others.

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# Supporting Your Teenager During Puberty



By **Dr Thiyagar Nadarajaw**, Consultant Paediatrician & Adolescent Medicine Specialist

*Puberty marks a period of changes that your child goes through as they begin the transition into adulthood. During this period, parents should understand the changes that occur in their teenager and how to support their changing needs.*

## What should parents expect?

Throughout puberty, teenagers experience numerous changes. Generally, physical changes experienced by most children include increased perspiration, oily skin and development of acne, oily hair, and growth spurts. However, specific physical changes can vary depending on different genders (**Table 1**).

**Table 1: Common Physical Puberty Changes in Teenagers According to Gender**

Males	Females
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocal changes (deeper voice)</li> <li>• Changes in the size of the testes and penis</li> <li>• Hair growth (facial, pubic, armpit, etc.)</li> <li>• Weight gain and muscle growth</li> <li>• Broadening of shoulders</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breast development</li> <li>• Functional development of the ovaries</li> <li>• Hair growth (pubic, armpit, etc.)</li> <li>• Weight gain</li> <li>• Widening of hips</li> <li>• Start of period (menstruation)</li> </ul> 

In addition to physical changes, the hormones released during puberty can also cause social and emotional changes. As such, parents should expect their teenager to go through mood swings, changes in energy levels, and many more (**Table 2**).

**Table 2: Common Social/Emotional Changes in Teenagers During Puberty**

- Changes in identity (e.g. trying out new clothes and styles, listening to new music, etc.)
- Increased need for independence (e.g. getting ready for school themselves, looking to take on more responsibility, etc.)
- Increased sensitivity (e.g. being more sensitive about how they look, being more private about their personal life, etc.)
- Seeking new experiences (i.e. more risk-taking behaviours)



## Tips to support your teen during puberty

### • Open communication

Create a safe and non-judgemental environment for your teenager. This can help encourage them to openly talk to you about the changes and challenges they are experiencing.

### • Stay calm and be patient

As your teenager is going through numerous emotional changes, parents should expect things like mood swings and emotional outbursts. It is important to be empathetic, stay calm, and be patient when dealing with their changing emotions.

### • Provide reassurance

Encourage and praise your teenager when they show positive behaviours, achievements, or efforts, rather than scolding them or

focusing on their negative behaviours.

### • Encourage independence

As your teenager grows up, provide them with age-appropriate opportunities for independence. For example, getting ready for school by themselves, packing their own lunch for school, planning their own academic schedules, etc.

### • Offer guidance and emotional support

Offer guidance and advice when your teenager faces challenges (e.g. friendship, academic, or relationship problems) if they need it. Let your teenager know you are there for them and that they can always turn to you for support.

### • Seek professional help

If your teenager begins to experience changes that severely impact their day-to-day activities (e.g. severe acne, developing mental health disorders, abnormal physical development, etc.), seek help from an appropriate healthcare professional.



Puberty is a transformative period for teenagers, marked by physical, emotional, and social changes. By understanding the different changes that occur in teenagers during puberty, and preparing for them, parents can better support their teenager during this crucial period of change. PP

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