The First 10 Longevity Moves for Kids

that matter at any age!

Hi! I'm Dr. Tanya Altmann.

Hi! I'm Dr. Tanya Altmann, The Longevity Pediatrician. I'm a mom of three boys and a board-certified pediatrician with over 25 years of clinical experience helping children and families build strong, healthy foundations from the very beginning.

I founded Calabasas Pediatrics Wellness Center to bring an integrative, whole-child approach to care, combining medical science with nutrition, mental health, and lifestyle support. While I care for patients in Southern California, my goal is to help parents everywhere understand how early childhood shapes lifelong health, which is why I share my perspective on social media (@drtanyaaltmann) and created this guide to make longevity for your children simple and actionable.

Most conversations about longevity focus on adults trying to fix problems later in life, but the science points to much earlier as the ideal time to start. The daily habits, environments, and inputs in childhood quietly shape long-term health, creating an opportunity to support not just how long children live, but how well they live. This idea is at the heart of what I call "Longevity for Littles."

As an integrative longevity pediatrician, I look beyond treating illness in the moment. I combine traditional pediatric care with a focus on the root causes of long-term health, including nutrition, sleep, gut microbiome, environment, and daily habits. The goal is not just to help kids feel better today, but to build a strong foundation for lifelong health, resilience, and longevity for decades to come.

Dr. Tanya

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Whether your child is 2 days old or 12 years old, these are the foundations I guide parents to focus on to support lifelong health. I hope this guide is a helpful start for you!

1. Your Child's Health Starts in the Gut

The foundation of immunity, metabolism, and brain health begins with the gut microbiome. What you feed early on matters more than most parents realize.

Hard Truth: Most kids are not born with the ideal gut microbiome and early exposures shape it for life.

Support: Support a healthy microbiome. Breastfeed when possible or use high quality infant formula, introduce fiber-rich foods as they grow, and limit unnecessary antibiotics. Consider key strains of Bifidobacteria, which are beneficial gut bacteria that help train the immune system, and HMOs (human milk oligosaccharides), which are special nutrients in breast milk that help feed and support those good bacteria. Babies born via C-section may have different early bacterial exposure, which is why supporting the microbiome can be especially important. Colonizing a baby's gut with infant specific Bifidobacteria are especially critical after a C-section or if antibiotics were used during pregnancy or delivery.

2. Sleep Is Not Optional

Poor sleep in childhood does not just cause crankiness. Lack of sleep impacts learning, behavior, immune function, growth, and long-term health.

Hard Truth: Kids do not outgrow poor sleep habits. Sleep deprivation builds over time and affects learning, mood, and overall health.

Support: Start a wind-down, calming bedtime routine early. Keep the sleep environment cool, dark, and quiet. For older kids, stop screens 1 to 2 hours before bed and keep them out of the bedroom at night.

3. Calories Are Easy. Nutrients Are Not.

Most kids get plenty of calories but not enough of what they actually need to build their brain and stabilize their energy. Focus on nutrient density, including iron, vitamin D, omega-3s, choline, and protein, which all play key roles in development.

Hard Truth: Most kids start their day with sugar, not protein, and it shows in their energy, focus, and long-term health.

Support: Increase protein, especially in the morning. Many kids start the day with carbs, which leads to energy crashes. Aim for a high-protein breakfast of 15 to 25 grams and consider total daily intake closer to 1.0 to 1.5 g/kg/day depending on your child's growth and activity.

4. Iron Deficiency Is Hiding in Plain Sight

Even healthy kids with normal hemoglobin levels can be low in iron, and it directly affects attention, learning, sleep, and development.

Hard Truth: Normal hemoglobin does not rule out low iron. Ferritin (a measure of a body's iron stores) gives a more complete picture.

Support: Consider a lab test to check ferritin level. This is especially important if there are concerns with growth, attention, learning, or sleep. If ferritin is low (below 40 to 50 ng/mL) or your pediatrician recommends it, consider supplementation and prioritize iron-rich foods like red meat, chicken, fish, lentils, beans, eggs, and fortified foods. Pair with vitamin C-rich foods like citrus and tomato sauce to improve absorption.

5. Vitamin D Plays a Daily Role in Your Child's Health

Vitamin D supports immune function, helps regulate inflammation, contributes to bone development, and plays a role in energy and overall wellness.

Hard Truth: Many kids appear healthy but are quietly low in vitamin D.

Support: It is difficult to get enough vitamin D from diet alone, so most infants and children benefit from daily supplementation. Include safe sun exposure when possible and talk with your pediatrician about appropriate vitamin D dosing.

6. Ultra-Processed Foods Shape Long-Term Health

The more kids eat ultra-processed foods early, the more they crave them over time. These foods override natural hunger cues and reshape taste preferences. They also influence the gut microbiome, which affects immunity, metabolism, attention, and focus.

Hard Truth: The more ultra-processed foods kids eat early, the harder it is to shift their preferences later.

Support: Prioritize whole foods and limit packaged snacks and added sugars, especially in early years when taste preferences and habits are being formed.

7. Movement Supports Brain and Body Development

Kids are not built to sit all day. Regular movement supports how their brains develop, how they regulate emotions, and how their bodies grow.

Hard Truth: Long periods of sitting are becoming the norm, and it is affecting kids' health earlier than we expected.

Support: Daily movement improves focus, mood, sleep, and learning while reducing long-term disease risk. Encourage unstructured play for younger kids and a mix of activities for older kids.

8. Time Outside Supports Core Biological Functions

Sunlight and outdoor play help regulate circadian rhythms, support immune function, and improve mood. These are essential inputs for a healthy brain and body.

Hard Truth: Kids today are spending less time outdoors and more time on screens, and it shows up in their sleep, mood, and overall health.

Support: Get outside every day. Even 20 to 30 minutes makes a difference. Morning light is especially helpful for setting sleep-wake cycles.

9. Screen Exposure Influences Brain Development

Early and excessive screen exposure can affect how kids focus, process information, and communicate, especially during key stages of brain development.

Hard Truth: The more time kids spend on screens early, the less time their brains spend developing real-world communication and learning skills.

Support: Avoid screen time under age 2 as much as possible, except for interactive video chatting. For older kids, limit use, avoid screens before bed, and choose higher-quality content. Co-view when possible.

10. Your Child's Environment Shapes Long-Term Health

From toxins to stress to relationships, your child's daily environment influences their biology, brain wiring, and long-term health outcomes.

Hard Truth: Small daily exposures, both chemical and emotional, build up over time.

Support: Reduce exposure to toxins where possible. Minimize plastic use, especially when heating food. Choose glass or stainless steel. Use trusted resources like the Environmental Working Group and Clean Label Project to guide safer choices. Just as important, prioritize a calm and connected home environment. Emotional safety and strong relationships have a real biological impact.