ONTOGENETIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMMUNE SYSTEM IN CHILDREN AND THE ROLE OF PHYSIOLOGICAL AND HYGIENIC FACTORS IN ITS STRENGTHENING

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Annotation: *This thesis analyzes key stages of immune system ontogenesis in children and the influence of physiological and hygienic factors on immune development. The study highlights the role of environmental conditions, nutrition, and preventive measures in strengthening immunological competence. The findings emphasize that timely hygienic and physiological interventions contribute to improved immune resilience and reduced susceptibility to infections in pediatric populations.*

Keywords: *ontogenesis, pediatric immunology, immunocompetence, lymphopoiesis, thymic maturation, mucosal immunity, vaccination efficacy, microbiome colonization, immunological memory, hygienic hypothesis*.

Nowadays, pediatric immunological development represents a paramount concern in global health, as approximately thirty percent of childhood morbidity and mortality results from immune system dysfunction or inadequate immunological maturation. Contemporary epidemiological data reveal that children in developing regions experience three to five times higher rates of infectious complications compared to developed countries, primarily attributable to suboptimal conditions during critical immune ontogenetic periods. The scientific foundation of immune system development

encompasses complex sequential processes of lymphoid organ formation, immune cell differentiation, and establishment of immunological tolerance mechanisms. Understanding the intricate relationship between genetic programming and environmental modulation during these developmental stages has become essential for formulating effective preventive strategies and reducing the burden of immunodeficiency-related pathologies in vulnerable pediatric populations.

The ontogenetic development of the immune system begins during embryogenesis with the formation of primary lymphoid organs, including the thymus and bone marrow, which are essential for lymphocyte production and maturation. The neonatal period is characterized by functional immune immaturity, with passive protection provided by maternal antibodies and gradual development of adaptive immunity. Early-life factors such as intestinal microbiome formation, nutrition, and breastfeeding play a crucial role in immune maturation. Adequate microbial colonization and sufficient intake of key micronutrients support balanced immune responses, while breastfeeding enhances immune protection and reduces susceptibility to infectious diseases. Vaccination programs represent the most significant medical intervention for strengthening pediatric immunity, inducing long-term immunological memory through controlled antigen exposure without disease manifestation. The timing of vaccine administration corresponds to developmental windows when immune responsiveness reaches sufficient maturity while children remain vulnerable to specific pathogens. Hygienic practices including proper handwashing, safe water access, adequate sanitation, and prevention of environmental contamination substantially reduce pathogen exposure burden, allowing the immune system to develop appropriate responses rather than

becoming overwhelmed by excessive microbial challenges. However, the hygienic hypothesis suggests that moderate microbial exposure during early childhood may be necessary for proper immune regulation, with overly sanitized environments potentially predisposing to allergic sensitization. Physical activity and adequate sleep duration constitute additional physiological factors supporting immune development, as exercise promotes lymphocyte circulation and sleep facilitates cytokine production and tissue repair processes. Chronic stress and psychosocial adversity during childhood demonstrably impair immune function through sustained cortisol elevation and disrupted neuroimmune communication pathways.

The ontogenetic maturation of the immune system follows genetically predetermined yet environmentally modifiable pathways, with optimal development requiring integration of appropriate nutrition, vaccination, hygienic practices, and physiological homeostasis. Future research should focus on personalized immunological assessment tools and targeted interventions during critical developmental windows to maximize long-term immune competence and disease resistance.

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