



What my One-Year-Old Taught Me About Health

When my one-year-old daughter developed a fever, I felt it immediately, not in my hands when I touched her warm forehead, but in my chest.

As a chiropractor myself, I understand physiology; I knew what a fever represented. I have explained to countless parents that it is not the enemy, but a coordinated immune response.

And yet, in that moment, knowledge did not quiet my nervous system. My mind began scanning, question after question. How high is it? How long has it been? Is this serious? I could feel the rise of my parental anxiety, that surge of urgency that makes you want to fix, measure, control. And then something shifted. She wasn't panicking. She wasn't inconsolable. She wasn't asking for medicine. She was reaching for me.

She wanted to be held, to nurse, to rest against my chest, to hear my voice, to be sung to, to sway and dance while I carried her. She wanted reassurance in its most primitive and powerful form, connection. In that moment, I reminded myself that the fever was her immune system doing its job. My worry, however well intentioned, was not helping her body do its job. What she needed most was regulation and she was borrowing it from me.

The Biology Beneath the Bond

In my office, I often speak to parents about nervous system regulation, tone, and adaptability and how the body functions at its best when it feels safe. Young children do not self-regulate effectively during stress. Their nervous systems are still developing and so they rely on co-regulation, the steadying presence of a caregiver, to stabilize their internal state. When I was tense, scanning, and worried, she became clingier. When I softened, slowed my breathing, relaxed my shoulders, sang gently and held her close, her body softened too. Her breathing slowed, she rested more deeply, she nursed longer, and she slept. In that shift, I witnessed something I had previously understood only intellectually: The environment of illness matters.

A Salutogenic Lens

The concept of salutogenesis reminds us to ask not only "What causes disease?" but also "What creates health?" Even in the presence of fever, health can be supported. My daughter's immune system was active, raising her temperature to clear the body. But her overall movement toward wellness depended on more than biology, it depended on safety. Through simple actions, holding, breastfeeding, singing, moving rhythmically together, I was strengthening her in more ways than I, at the time, could imagine.

Comprehensibility: My calm tone signaled, *"This is manageable."*

Manageability: My presence communicated, *"You are not alone."*

Meaningfulness: Our closeness reinforced, *"You are safe and loved."*

Her body could focus on healing instead of fighting fear.

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The Power of Breastfeeding and Movement

Breastfeeding during illness is more than nutrition. It is hydration, immune support, regulation, warmth, and attachment, all in one act. The rhythmic sway of dancing while holding her was not entertainment. It was nervous system regulation. Gentle movement stimulates the vestibular system, which can promote calming responses. Singing, even softly and imperfectly, adds predictable auditory cues. Predictability reduces stress activation. These small comforts become biological supports.

The Turning Point

The real work, I realized, was not lowering her fever, it was lowering my own sympathetic activation. That night, I was reminded that my tone influenced hers. The subtle balance within the nervous system that allows adaptability. When I regulated myself, she did not need to escalate her signals. She did not need to cry harder. She simply melted into me. In that space, healing felt less frantic and more trusting.

A Broader Reflection

Illness in infancy is inevitable. But the tone we bring to it shapes how it is encoded. Repeated experiences of discomfort and steady presence, vulnerability and closeness, fever and safety build resilience. That night, as I held her warm little body and swayed in our living room, I understood that health is not merely the absence of symptoms. Health is coherence and connection. Health is a nervous system that knows it can move through stress and return to balance. My daughter's fever passed that night, but what stayed with me was that sometimes the most powerful medicine is not something we administer, it's something we embody. Sometimes, what a sick child wants most is exactly what we are biologically designed to give, ourselves.

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Connecting the Early Red Flags to Later Labels

When you step back and lay the timelines on top of each other, a common pattern emerges:

1. Early red flags

- Colic, reflux, constipation
- Poor weight gain or “picky” feeding
- Hard-to-soothe crying, very light or restless sleep

2. Emerging developmental concerns

- Delayed motor or speech milestones
- Retained primitive reflexes • Sensory seeking or sensory avoidance
- Frequent meltdowns, rigid routines, school refusal

3. Later diagnostic labels

- ADHD, anxiety, OCD, TS, “behavior disorders”
- Learning challenges, social struggles
- Ongoing gut issues, headaches, chronic pain

From a chiropractic perspective, these are not separate conditions to be treated in isolation, but points along a trajectory shaped by:

- Early stress and adversity
- Autonomic and HPA-axis programming
- Gut-brain and sensory integration
- Subluxation and altered afferent input

This is why a child’s story of dysfunction in infancy matters when evaluating their ADHD and anxiety at age 8. It is why the “baby who never slept” matters when the teenager is on three medications for mood and migraine. The nervous system remembers.

Chiropractic care, when grounded in a brain-based, autonomic-aware approach, offers a powerful way to support these pathways. It can help children move from the “early colic, reflux, constipation, and failure to thrive (FTT)” chapter into a future where their nervous systems are more resilient, their bodies more at ease, and their true selves can shine through more fully.

For many families, that shift is the real miracle.