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ADHD: FOODS, DIET, & NUTRITION

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Did you know that in 2016 the CDC reported that 6.1 million American children had been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADHD or ADD)? That's a 43% increase since 2003.

As parents and families begin noticing the signs, it's common to look for treatments and ways to manage symptoms. The most common being medication and behavioral therapy. However, one thing that doesn't get enough attention is diet. By following a proper nutrition plan, parents can help their children control symptoms of attention deficit. Below is a list of some of the key food items parents should look to incorporate into their children's diet and avoid.



ITEMS TO AVOID:

SIMPLE SUGARS:

Overall, most people should limit simple carbohydrates, like candy, corn syrup, honey, sugar, and products made from white flour, white rice, and potatoes without the skin. Limiting these foods may be even more critical for children with ADHD. Several studies suggest that some children who have ADHD are "turned on" by copious amounts of sugar. One study concluded that the more

sugar hyperactive children consumed, the more destructive and restless they became. Another study conducted at Yale University indicated that high-sugar diets can increase inattention in some kids.

So, what can you do? For starters, try to avoid things like “fruit” drinks that are higher in sugar than 100% fruit juice. Also, read food labels carefully, looking for hidden sugars like high-fructose corn sweetener, dehydrated can juice, dextrin, dextrose, maltodextrin, sucrose, molasses, and malt syrup.

If your child has a sweet tooth, try to replace some of their go-to snacks with whole fruit options. While fruits still contain sugar, if eaten whole, the fiber in them will allow for the sugars to be digested more slowly and a more gradual and sustained blood sugar release.

ARTIFICIAL DYES AND PRESERVATIVES:

Several studies suggest that some children with ADHD are adversely affected by food additives. One recently published study in *The Lancet* indicates that artificial food coloring, flavors, and preservative sodium benzoate make some kids without ADHD more hyperactive. As much as we enjoyed them growing up, this means saying goodbye to cereals like Fruit Loops and Lucky Charms and replacing them with healthier, low-sugar options like Cheerios. Parents should also swap out soft drinks and fruit punches, which often have artificial colors and flavors, with 100% fruit juice.



FOODS THAT CAUSE ALLERGIES:

Not all healthy foods are created equal and, in some cases, can be considered an allergen. If your child is sensitive to such allergens, they may affect their brain functions and trigger hyperactivity or inattentiveness. Below is a list of the top eight food allergens. While eliminating these foods altogether may be unnecessary, tracking connections between food and behavior will help identify foods that should be avoided.

- Wheat
- Milk
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts
- Eggs
- Soy
- Fish
- Shellfish

ITEMS TO INCLUDE:

PROTEIN:

Without protein, the body can experience surges in blood sugar, which can increase hyperactivity. Protein-rich foods are also used by the body to make neurotransmitters, the chemicals released by brain cells to communicate with each other. Foods rich in protein, including lean beef, pork, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, nuts, soy, and low-fat dairy products, can benefit ADHD symptoms.

Looking for ways to incorporate more protein into your child's diet? Here are some ideas.

- Top waffles with melted cheese or ham and cheese, instead of syrup or fruit.
- Spread peanut butter on apple slices, a halved banana, or celery sticks.
- Fill a breakfast burrito with scrambled eggs, black beans, and cheese.
- Spread a toasted, whole-grain bagel or toast with natural peanut butter or another nut butter, such as almond or hazelnut. Adding a dab of all-fruit jam is just fine.
- Wrap a slice of turkey bacon around a firm-ripe banana; broil or grill until the bacon is thoroughly cooked.
- Sauté lean breakfast sausage patties with pieces of diced apples.
- Swirl crushed fruit or all-fruit jam into plain yogurt and top with dry, whole-grain cereal or chopped nuts.
- Fill an omelet with chopped or sliced fresh fruit or spreadable fruit.
- Serve tuna or chicken salad, sloppy joe's, chili, or baked beans over toast.
- Offer eggs and a smoothie. To save time, make hard-boiled or deviled eggs the night before.
- Toast a slice of whole-grain bread and add a little whipped butter or margarine and a dab of all-fruit jam or milk.
- Serve whole-grain cereal with low-fat milk, lean meat from last night's dinner (pork chop, chicken), and orange sections.
- Top plain yogurt with fresh fruit or mix in oatmeal.
- Offer a grilled cheese sandwich made with whole-grain bread and two-percent cheese.
- Blend up a homemade instant breakfast shake or make sausage patties (see recipes, left sidebar).
- Serve a veggie omelet with a bran muffin.
- Offer mixed nuts, fresh fruit, and a glass of milk — an excellent breakfast for kids who graze.

COMPLEX CARBOHYDRATES:

Once you've minimized the simple sugars, the next thing is to look for the complex carbohydrates. These starches are broken down more slowly and provide a steadier supply of energy needed to help focus. Examples include oatmeal, yams, brown rice, sweet potatoes, and 100% whole wheat bread and pasta. Eating the right amount of complex carbohydrates can also have a calming effect on those with ADHD by increasing serotonin levels.

Examples of a complex carbohydrate meal or snack include oatmeal, a glass of milk, and peanut butter on a piece of whole-grain bread.

OMEGA-3'S:

Omega-3s are essential fats found in cold-water fatty fish such as sardines, tuna, and salmon. These fats are believed to be essential for normal brain and nerve cell function and have also been shown to affect children with ADHD positively. In a 2009 study from Sweden, 25 percent of the children taking a daily dose of omega-3s had a significant decrease in symptoms after three months. After six months, almost 50 percent experienced improved symptom management. While this sounds very promising, the likelihood of a child eating sardines and tuna daily isn't realistic. Parents should first try to incorporate these foods into their regular diets using recipes like Salmon Patties and Tuna Melts. After that, you may want to consider a fish oil supplement. Since these supplements come in different forms, it's best to talk to a nutritionist before grabbing the first thing on the shelf.

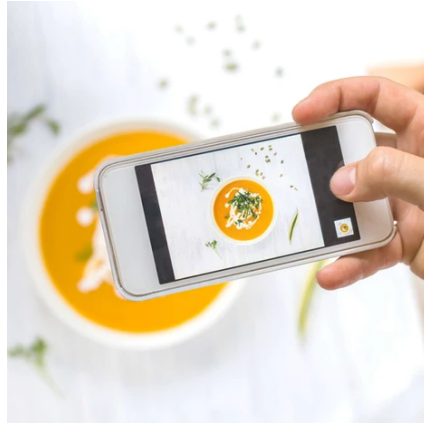
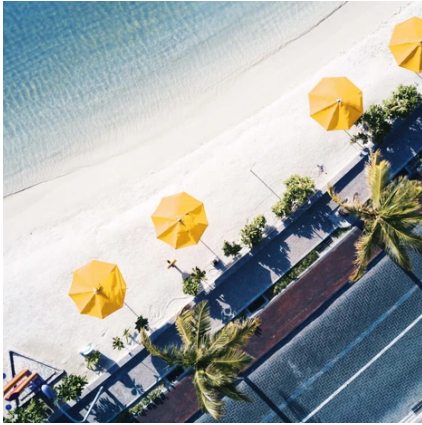
VITAMINS AND MINERALS:

Nutrients like zinc, iron, magnesium, and B vitamins are crucial for brain health, focus, and neurotransmitter function and are important for children with ADHD. In a [study](#), scientists discovered that a blend of magnesium and vitamin B6 taken over two months led to notable improvements in hyperactivity, inattention, and aggression. But, when the children stopped taking the supplements, they noticed a return in these symptoms. Children can also obtain these vitamins and minerals through a healthy and

varied diet. Zinc-rich foods include nuts, peanuts, eggs, whole grains, lean beef, and pork. You can find significant iron levels in spinach, legumes, lean beef, quinoa, turkey, and broccoli. Magnesium is plentiful in many food items, including bananas, avocados, leafy greens, and fatty fish such as salmon. However, if incorporating these foods into your child's diet does not produce the level of positive adaptations sought, consider utilizing supplements to achieve a healthy balance of zinc, iron, magnesium, and B vitamins in your child's diet.

READY TO GET COOKING??

We hope you found this information about ADHD and food diets helpful, but as always, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact our clinic at (704) 752-8100. We have health coaches on staff and will gladly schedule a free phone consultation with Dr. Brown.



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