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Can nutrition help manage a child's ADHD symptoms?



Medically reviewed by [Karen Gill, M.D.](#) — Written by [Beth Sissons](#) on June 1, 2023

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There is no specific diet to manage the symptoms of ADHD in children and adults. However, a nutritious diet may provide some benefits and support overall health.

Methods to manage ADHD symptoms include medication, cognitive or behavioral therapy, and organizational strategies.

There is conflicting evidence on the benefits of diet and nutrient supplementation for ADHD, but a nutritious diet may improve overall health and help reduce ADHD symptoms in some cases.

This article looks at the potential effects of diet on ADHD, which dietary changes may help people with ADHD, and which changes they may wish to avoid.

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How does diet affect ADHD in children?



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According to a [2022 review](#)⁹, diet can potentially affect the symptoms of ADHD.

For example, some research within the review found dietary sugars had a negative effect on ADHD symptoms, while other research found no significant link. More research is necessary to establish the effects of diet on these symptoms.

A [2022 article](#) states that research has not convincingly shown a causal link between ADHD and diet.

Vitamins and minerals

According to a [2017 review](#)⁹, some research suggests nutritional deficits may play a role in the development of ADHD symptoms. These deficits may include long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) and trace minerals, such as zinc, iron, and magnesium.

However, it notes that supplementing these nutrients had marginal benefits and usually had mixed or inconclusive results.

If children with ADHD have deficiencies in these nutrients, supplements may affect their ADHD symptoms. However, further research is necessary to determine whether there is a link between these nutrients and ADHD symptoms.

People may choose to undergo testing with a healthcare professional to see if they or a child require additional vitamins and minerals through diet or supplementation.

Omega-3 fatty acids

PUFAs are vital for optimal neurotransmitter function. Research in a [2022 review](#)⁹ suggests that children and adolescents with ADHD may have lower levels of omega-3 fatty acids, including eicosapentaenoic acid and docosahexaenoic acid, and total PUFAs.

If children are not getting enough omega-3 fatty acids through their diet, parents or caregivers may want to talk with a healthcare professional about taking a supplement. However, there is [little evidence](#) to suggest [omega-3](#) PUFA supplementation alone will affect ADHD symptoms.

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Which diet is best for children with ADHD?

Within the above [2022 review](#), research suggests that diets high in sweetened foods, fried foods, and salt may link to learning, attention, and behavioral problems. The evidence found that a balanced diet with a high intake of vegetables and dairy products led to the opposite association.

It also suggests that diets high in processed, sweet, snack, and junk foods may have links to a higher incidence of ADHD. Additionally, diets such as vegetarian and Mediterranean diets may decrease the risk.

The review also highlighted the prevalence of elimination diets in the study of nutrition and ADHD. An elimination diet gradually removes individual foods to try and isolate ingredients or nutrients that may affect people.

However, these diets have shown scarce evidence in the study of diet and ADHD. Additionally, they can lead to nutritional deficiencies and growth issues in children with ADHD.

A person can consult a doctor if they believe that a certain ingredient or nutrient may be affecting their ADHD symptoms or those of a child.

Foods to eat

The [Child Mind Institute](#) highlights that there is limited research on whether certain foods can reduce ADHD symptoms. However, eating certain foods can help promote overall health and may support brain health.

This includes a diet focused on:

- vegetables
- fruits
- sources of [protein](#), such as eggs, milk, lean meat, nuts, soy, and low fat yogurt
- healthy fats, such as fatty fish, avocado, chia seeds, flaxseed, and tofu
- complex [carbohydrates](#), such as beans, lentils, peas, brown rice, oatmeal, and whole grains
- sources of vitamin B, such as leafy greens, broccoli, and chickpeas
- sources of zinc, iron, and magnesium, such as in poultry, seafood, meat, nuts, and soy
- [omega-3 fatty acids](#), such as in salmon, walnuts, and [edamame](#)

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ADHD is not laziness a depression response

Procrastination is an emotional regulation problem. Procrastination is focused on "the immediate urgency of managing negative moods" not the task. Once you learn simple truth of where it comes from and why it dissolves almost instantly and you almost forget how to waste time & interested in discovering your dominant Procrastination type, taking be a helpful starting point.

Dreamer	Mixed	Perfectionist	Overthinker
Visual memory	Critical thinking	Nature connection	Apartment
Memory	Problem solving	Easy understanding	Control
Communication	Strategic planning	Self-organization	At risk
Team cooperation	Strategizing	Problem identification	Photo
Goal setting	Mathematical	Goal setting skills	Insight

Foods to avoid

Avoiding or limiting added sugars [may help](#) manage ADHD symptoms, as sugar may temporarily increase overactivity. Limiting sugar intake can also help improve overall health, support weight management, improve sleep, and reduce the risk of [diabetes](#).

Foods to limit or avoid may include:

- sugar and syrups
- sweets and candy
- sweetened breakfast cereals
- cookies, cakes, and pastries
- processed foods, such as snack foods and potato chips

Many ADHD diets recommend avoiding additives, food colorings, and preservatives. However, currently, there is [no strong evidence](#) to suggest eliminating food colorings has a significant effect on ADHD.

Was this article helpful?

Yes

No

Drinks for a child with ADHD

Research suggests a link between increased consumption of sweetened drinks and a [40% increase](#) in the chance of ADHD symptoms in children over the age of 7 years, in comparison with children who drank fewer sweetened drinks.

People may want to limit or avoid drinks high in sugar, such as:

- soda
- fruit juices
- energy drinks

Drinking plenty of water can help children stay well hydrated and may support brain function, according to the [Food for the Brain Foundation](#). Adding lemon, lime, or berries may help add flavor.

Additionally, caffeine [may increase](#) overactivity in some children, so it may be best to limit or avoid products containing it.

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Diet for adults with ADHD

Generally, dietary recommendations are similar for adults with ADHD as children with the condition.

Adults may want to limit caffeine consumption if it causes side effects, such as [anxiety](#), [insomnia](#), or irritability. The risk of caffeine side effects [may increase](#) with the use of stimulant medications.

Summary

There are no set guidelines for an ADHD diet, but eating a diet that helps support overall health may also have benefits for the condition.

There may be risks or interactions with supplements or herbal remedies and ADHD

medications. People can work alongside a healthcare professional to discuss any dietary changes and avoid these risks.

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