

Tips to Get Your Kid With ADHD to Eat



Medically Reviewed by [Shruthi N, MD](#) on May 20, 2024



It's Common: ADHD and the Uneaten Lunch

Don't stress if you open your kid's lunchbox after school to find the food untouched. You're not alone. Sometimes kids who take stimulants for ADHD don't get hungry. It's not easy to make sure they eat while they're at school. Pack only their favorite foods, and ask teachers to remind them to eat. If they don't, that's OK -- you can focus more on meals at home. They'll get the nutrition they need.



Have a Big Breakfast

Is your kid a light eater? Give them high-calorie foods before they take their meds in the morning. They don't like bacon and eggs? Offer a leftover burger or slice of pizza and a side of fruit for breakfast. Kids need calories and nutrition to fuel their growth and give them energy for the day.

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Offer Snacks Often

When their blood sugar drops, they might get cranky and lose focus. A yogurt smoothie makes a great snack. The protein will keep them on track and may prevent mood swings. Add fruit and flaxseeds, which have healthy omega-3s, for an extra boost. Nuts -- also packed with protein and calories-- are good for snacks or to round out meals for light eaters. Or you can offer greek yogurt instead of a yogurt smoothie.

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Make Food Fun

Some kids with ADHD don't eat enough because they get bored with meals quickly. Give them a plate that grabs their attention. Use cookie cutters to shape sandwiches. Arrange food on the plate to make designs or faces. Offer sauces and dips to make the meal more interesting. It can help too if you let your child take part in grocery shopping and making their own fun lunches. Doing so will help them take more interest in eating their own food.

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Serve Smaller Portions of High-Calorie Foods

If medications turn your kid off from food, serve their fave foods first -- they'll be more likely to eat. Start with high-calorie foods, like meat and grains. Small portions may have more appeal. When you serve veggies, add cheese or olive oil to boost the calorie count.

Whether they're a light eater or overeats out of boredom, a nutritionist or pediatrician can help you both make healthy choices.

6/11

Create Calmer Dinners

Does your kid bolt from the table after a few bites? Change your dinner habits. Try to calm things down. Have them sit next to you, instead of a sibling. Dim the lights or play soothing music. Have their face away from mirrors or windows that might draw their mind away from the meal. Ask them questions about things that happened during the day.

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Be Flexible With Meal Times

Kids with ADHD may not be hungry at regular times. Work with them. Try moving the family dinner later. Or, feed kids who aren't that hungry a light meal and offer snacks later in the evening. Leave non-perishable food on the counter, so kids can graze as their medication wears off and hunger returns.

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Should You Ban Food Additives?

We don't know for sure if food additives or coloring affect ADHD symptoms. If you want to avoid those foods, there's no risk in doing so. Try it for a few months to see if it helps.

How about special diets like going gluten-free? Any diet where you restrict a lot of foods can be hard to follow and may cause nutritional problems. Talk with your pediatrician first.

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Orange Juice and ADHD Meds

Be careful with acidic drinks, like orange juice or grapefruit juice. Some citrus juices can interfere with the way ADHD medications work. Instead of OJ in the morning, offer milk or other non-citrus drinks when it's time for them to take their medicine.

10/11

How to Deal With Picky Eaters

Lots of kids are picky eaters, whether they take medications that suppress their appetite or not. If your child rejects a new food, don't give up. It may take 10 or more times before they'll even taste it. Put at least one food they like on the plate.

11/11

Above All: Keep Calm, Carry On

It isn't always easy to get kids with ADHD to eat. But you can make it go more smoothly. Don't get into a struggle or make demands at dinner. If you insist your child finish a meal, or eat when they say they're not hungry, it will backfire. They may just dig in their heels, making mealtime unpleasant. Go with the flow. Offer nutritious options. Make it easier for your child to eat when they are hungry, so everyone can be healthy and happy.

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