

### ADHD and Nutrition

Your child has a hard time sitting still in class. At home, he needs to stop bouncing off the walls. Some parents are looking at their child's diet before turning to medication to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, known as ADHD. Other families are looking to modify their child's diet in addition to giving their child medication or using behavior therapy.

Children with ADHD are typically very active, unable to focus on some activities, and impulsive, that is they seem to act without thinking about the consequences. ADHD is the most commonly diagnosed behavioral disorder in childhood.

We developed this tip sheet about nutrition and ADHD because we keep hearing from grandparents who tell us nutritional changes made a very positive difference for their children. Whether diet makes a difference for ADHD is a controversial issue in the medical community. Medication often produces fast results and is preferred by many physicians. Changes in diet usually produce slower results. A review of 23 controlled research studies into this issue found that 17 concluded that avoiding some foods helped children with ADHD.

There are many ADHD diets and it may be confusing. One is the regimented Feingold Method, which eliminates synthetic food colors, flavors and additives such as MSG, BHA, BHT, and TBHQ. Another option is elimination diets, which require the parents to take away multiple food categories and then reintroduce them one by one to see how they affect mood and behavior. If you choose a nutritional plan, make sure the changes are realistic for your family and don't create additional stress as you attempt to follow them. You may want to pick some aspect of the diet, such as sugar, and watch over time to see if your child has a change in behavior. It may be easier for your child to adjust to a new diet if the whole family also adjusts to it. You may need to eat healthier, too! A healthcare professional can help you figure out the right nutrient mix for your child.

#### HEALTHY FOODS TO GIVE YOUR CHILD

1. **Essential fatty acids:** fish, flax seeds and nuts.
2. **Vitamin B Complex foods:** nuts, liver, nutritional yeast, whole grain cereals, and breads, rice, milk, eggs, meats, fish, leafy green vegetables and soy.
3. **Protein** at breakfast and lunch especially. Foods such as yogurt smoothies with protein powder mixed in, yogurt smoothies with fruit added, nuts, seeds, brown rice cakes with hummus, string cheese wrapped in whole grain bread and nut butters on bread.
4. **Calcium and magnesium** are found in foods such as milk and milk products. As well as green veggies (broccoli, kale, spinach, beans and peas), seeds, whole grains and cereals.

#### FOODS TO AVOID WITH YOUR CHILD

##### **Sugar**

Sugar may rob your child's body of vitamins, minerals, and enzymes and may increase hyperactivity by preventing blood sugar levels from remaining stable. Stay away from corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, sucrose, dextrose and fructose that are added to so many snacks and breakfast foods. Try sucaneet (pressed sugar cane juice), molasses or honey as sweeteners.

### **Additives**

Blue bubblegum, pink and yellow cake decorations, goldfish crackers dyed the color of the rainbow- all are a visual delight for any child. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved several hundred food additives designed to improve flavor, taste and appearance but this doesn't mean they are healthy for your child with ADHD. Steer clear of artificial dyes and flavors. Grandparents have told us that avoiding all foods with red and yellow food coloring and monosodium glutamate, also known as MSG, has made a difference for their children.

### **Hydrogenated Oils**

The wrong kind of fats may interfere with healthy brain function. The wrong kinds of fats are trans and saturated fats, generally the ones that harden at room temperature. Healthier oils are available such as flax seed, canola and olive oils.

### **Caffeine**

Caffeine may pull minerals out of the bone and kids need minerals. Coffee, tea, and caffeinated soda are acidic and lower the natural PH of the body making it harder to find a natural balance. Soda is bad for your kids. If you do give them soda, go for caffeine free.

### **Salt**

Some snackers forgo sugar in favor of salt, but sodium is another nutrient to avoid in excess. Similar to caffeine, salt can lead to a depletion of the minerals needed to keep the neurons fire in a healthy manner. Try trading tortilla chips, pretzels and other high salt snacks for potassium rich fruits and vegetables. Already made soups and frozen dinners and snacks also tend to be high in sodium so read your labels.

---

Information for this tip sheet was gathered from The ADD Nutrition Solution: A 30 Day Drug Free Plan by Marcia Zimmerman; Feeding the Brain: How Food affects Children by C. Keith Conners; [www.feingold.org](http://www.feingold.org) and [www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov) (in the search field, write in the number ED437785, then on the next screen click on the title "Diet, ADHD and Behavior."

Maine Kids-Kin library has many books on ADHD as well as Feeding the Brain.



304 Hancock Street, Suite 2B  
Bangor, ME 04401  
1-866-298-0896  
[www.mainekids-kin.org](http://www.mainekids-kin.org)

Copies of our tip sheets may be found on our web site at [www.mainekids-kin.org](http://www.mainekids-kin.org)  
Please contact us for permission to reproduce Maine Kids-Kin materials at [info@mainekids-kin.org](mailto:info@mainekids-kin.org)