For Kids With ADHD, a Healthy and Balanced Diet Is Key

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Is There a Proper ADHD Diet for Kids?

When my daughter was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), her doctor didn't recommend any special diet or restrictions. I was told that if the medication caused her appetite to decrease, to just let her eat when she was hungry.

I was advised to give balanced meals with snacks throughout the day and make sure she always had a protein when she ate carbohydrates. An omega 3 supplement was also recommended.
That seemed fairly simple. I was new to the official ADHD world, and it was only after my child's diagnosis that I started reading and hearing about particular diets and restrictive eating plans.

I had to do my own research and come to the conclusions that worked best for my daughter. Everyone is different — and in trying to manage symptoms (and make life just a bit easier for our children) — anything we can do that gives a positive result is well worth the time and effort.

Does Diet Cause ADHD?

No research has proven that diet causes ADHD. It is also true that research has not found any particular food or avoidance of food to cure it.

Some foods may affect one child while having no impact on another. Going through the process of eliminating certain foods to see how they affect your child can be helpful for a couple of reasons. In some cases, a food allergy can mimic symptoms of ADHD. Also, for some children, things like artificial food coloring may increase hyperactivity.

While diet is very important to our children's health, there is no evidence that diet is one of the causes of ADHD.

If you believe certain foods make symptoms worse, then eliminate those foods one by one to see what does or does not affect your child.

Proper Nutrition is Essential

Proper nutrition is vital to the physical and mental health of a growing child. It is important to give your child the vitamins and nutrients they need for good health; this can help you plan a proper ADHD diet for kids.

Foods Important for Health

A diet rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats, calcium and protein will give your child the nutrition they need.
Protein can come from lean meats or be plant based. Processed meats should be avoided. Plant based proteins

are rich in other vitamins and minerals needed by our bodies and are an excellent choice for a healthy diet.

Foods to Avoid

What foods should you avoid if you have ADHD? They are the same foods that should be avoided by anyone in order to be healthy.
Many foods marketed for children are full of artificial dyes to make them colorful and attractive. These products are often full of sugar and chemicals; the breakfast cereal and candy aisles come to mind.

Too much sugar may not cause hyperactive behavior (although this can be a point of argument among many) but excessive sugar intake does cause weight gain and increase the risk of heart disease and Type 2 Diabetes.

Fast foods as well as processed foods contain too much salt, sugar and unhealthy fats. While very calorie dense, the food doesn't reach the receptors in the stomach that sense fullness. There is also no nutrition in these types of foods to feed brains and bodies, and the stomach will still look for something more. Instead, have your child fill up on foods that are nutritionally dense, without the heavy calorie count.

Foods that lead to obesity and high cholesterol include saturated fats, hydrogenated fats and trans fats. These are found in meat, poultry, dairy, shortening, margarine, processed foods, fast food and packaged snacks.

What Does This Mean for Our Kids With ADHD?

If you have found a very specific diet was life changing for your child, then you found the one thing that truly matters. We want our children to function their best and there is no one way for that to happen.

I tried eliminating certain foods from my daughter's diet only to find they had no effect on her ADHD symptoms. I choose to focus on overall health and well-being and a diet that provides her with sound nutrition.

I doubt any family's diet is perfect all the time. Some days a tired parent might choose fast food. Some parents might give the occasional sugary treat, while others follow a very strict no sugar rule in their homes. Some opt for the elimination of animal products permanently, while some choose a mostly plant based solution.

At the end of the day we do what is best for our children, and that will never be wrong. Optimal nutrition should always be our guideline for not only lessening ADHD symptoms, but also providing our children with the nutritious food they need.

Some things a parent can do to help their ADHD child with their diet are:

- Schedule regular meal and snack times
- Don't keep junk food or soda in the house
- Keep fruits and vegetables prepared and in easy to reach containers in the fridge
- Make sure all meals and snacks are balanced, such as offering a protein with a carbohydrate

I tend to keep homemade trail mix, energy bites, nuts and seeds, healthy breakfast muffins, and non-dairy yogurt on hand. There is also spinach and other vegetables in the fridge for a salad or a quick veggie pizza for my now teen daughter.

Does my daughter eat a perfect diet? No. Will she always love ice cream? Yes. Over the years we learned what works for us. Choosing whole foods, avoiding pre-packaged items, and planning meals and snacks worked well for her.

When we eat a lot of junk or choose options that don't provide adequate nutrition, we can tell by the way we feel. As an adult with ADHD, I feel my best and more in control of my symptoms when I give my body the proper fuel it needs. I want the same for my kid.

Ultimately, the best ADHD diet for kids is one that provides proper nutrition.