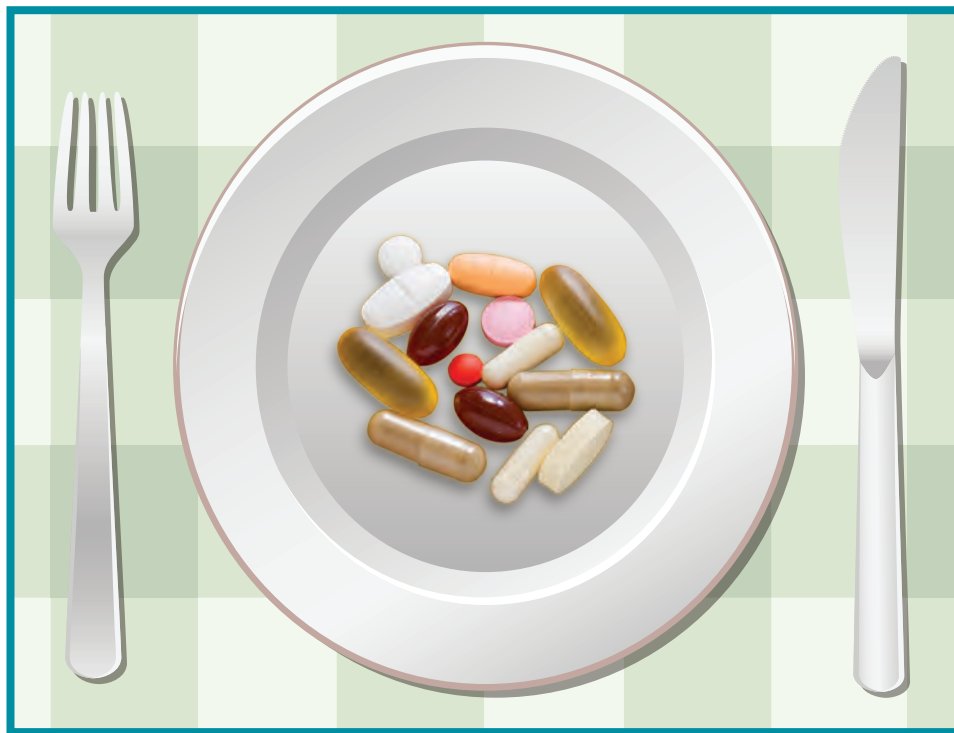


ADHD Vitamins & Supplements



From **ADDitude's** Experts

ADDITUDE
LIVING WELL WITH **ATTENTION DEFICIT**

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ADHD Vitamins & Supplements

by *ADDitude* Editors

Most ADHD professionals recommend eating a diet full of fruits and vegetables, complex carbs, and some lean protein with every meal to help manage symptoms. However, not everyone eats the right foods to achieve beneficial levels of certain proteins. In other cases, our bodies don't produce some nutrients we need, so we have to get them from supplements.

There are several things to remember when taking vitamins and supplements. "All natural" is not synonymous with "safe." Many herbs and supplements have side effects, may cause or worsen health problems, or interfere with prescription medications. Talk with your doctor before taking any supplements. When your doctor asks if you are taking any medications, be sure to tell him about all vitamins and supplements you take on a daily basis.

For many supplements, there isn't a lot of research to determine a recommended daily dose. Pay attention to your body and adjust the dosage if you notice something is wrong. For example, you may be taking zinc supplements and find yourself getting stomachaches. Discontinue or cut back on the supplement to see if the stomachaches disappear.

Here is a list of ADD-friendly vitamins and supplements you may want to try:

Go for Omega-3s

If you are looking for a single supplement to add to your diet, it should be omega-3 fatty acids. Besides being good for heart health, recent studies have shown that omega-3s improve symptoms of ADHD. A comprehensive look at many studies showed that omega-3s are about 40 percent as effective as stimulants in relieving symptoms.

Take Optimal Amounts of Omega-3s

According to Dr. Sandy Newmark, author of *ADHD Without Drugs*, kids between four and eight years old should take between 1,000-1,500 mg. a day. Older kids should get 2,000-2,500 mg. daily. Look for a product that has twice the amount of EPA to DHA—the two main types of omega-3 fatty acids. Liquid or capsule forms of omega-3s are best. The gummy and chewable versions have lower amounts of EPA and DHA, requiring your child to take too many to reach the recommended dose.

Think About Zinc

Some studies have shown that children with ADHD may have lower levels of zinc. Taking a zinc supplement may reduce hyperactivity and impulsivity but not inattentiveness. High levels of zinc, however, may be dangerous. Have your doctor check your child's zinc levels before taking a supplement. If you do add a zinc supplement, Dr. Newmark suggests that children with ADHD take a 20 mg. supplement daily.

Do Not Sell Yourself Short on Iron

Some experts believe that iron deficiencies may contribute to ADHD symptoms in children. A study completed in 2008 showed children who were not anemic but had low ferritin levels, a protein needed to store iron in the blood, showed significant improvement of ADHD symptoms after 12 weeks of iron supplements. Before taking iron supplements, speak with your doctor about checking iron levels: High iron levels can be dangerous.

Calm Down with Magnesium

Low levels of magnesium can increase hyperactivity and restlessness. Some small studies have shown that adding magnesium supplements decreases these symptoms. Magnesium is helpful at night to promote sleep and relaxation—big challenges for children and adults with ADHD. If you have these challenges, Dr. Newmark recommends taking 100 to 200 mg. of magnesium daily.

Vitamin C Is Key

Vitamin C, says Dr. Ned Hallowell, author of *Delivered from Distraction*, is important in modulating the neurotransmitter dopamine at the synapses in the brain. (ADD stimulants are effective because they increase dopamine levels in the brain.) Hallowell recommends vitamin C from food, which is more effective than that found in pills. If your child doesn't eat foods high in vitamin C, try a daily supplement. One caution: Don't take vitamin C less than an hour before or after taking ADD meds. It prevents the med from being absorbed.

Cover Your Nutritional Bases

A daily multivitamin, containing the recommended daily allowance of vitamins and minerals, is important for optimal brain health. Many of the multivitamin/multimineral products on the market contain sugar, preservatives, and artificial colors, which may increase hyperactivity in children. Look for brands that are low in sugar with no artificial colors or flavors.

Mix It Up with Protein Supplements

If your child doesn't eat high-protein foods, which are key to increasing attentiveness and focus, or is a picky eater, give him a protein-powder drink in their place. You can mix it with his favorite juice or milk to help

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the protein go down easier. Look for brands that are low in sugar and free of artificial flavors and preservatives.

Reduce Anxiety in ADHD Children

Anxiety is often present in children with ADHD and can worsen symptoms. The nutritional supplement inositol can be helpful for anxiety. The dosage is based on weight. Consult a physician before giving your child inositol, says Dr. Newmark.

Perk Up Concentration

Pycnogenol, made from the bark of a pine tree, contains a number of strong antioxidants, which can protect the brain. There is not convincing research that pycnogenol is effective, says Dr. Newmark, but for some children it can improve concentration.

Help for Sleep

There is limited evidence that supports using herbs in treating ADHD. The herb valerian can calm hyperactivity and may reduce anxiety, but it doesn't improve concentration. Valerian also helps with sleep problems and lessens the "rebound effect" that some kids experience when stimulants wear off. Talk with your doctor or a nutritionist who specializes in herbs.

More Help at Bedtime

Melatonin is a natural hormone produced in our bodies to help us get to sleep. When we turn off the television, dim the lights, and settle down for bed, our body produces melatonin, and we become sleepy. But for those with ADHD, sleep is sometimes difficult to come by. Melatonin can help and is safe to take. Always start with the smallest possible dose.

Give Ginkgo and Ginseng a Try?

Some small studies show that Ginkgo biloba helps improve memory and, when taken with ginseng, can decrease impulsiveness and distractibility. Other studies have shown no or minimal improvement. Talk with your doctor or a nutritionist who specializes in herbs before trying them. These herbs can cause health problems, especially if you have a history of diabetes, seizures, or schizophrenia. They may also interfere with other meds.

Note: Always consult with your physician or other qualified health-care professional for questions about the health of you, your child, and family members. The information in this booklet and on ADDitudeMag.com do not replace professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

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