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5 WAYS TO... COOK UP AN ADHD-FRIENDLY DIET

Medication and behavioral therapy are the most effective approaches in managing ADHD symptoms, but the right diet may help as well.

1. Beef up protein levels at breakfast, lunch, and dinner to increase alertness in ADHD children and adults. A protein-rich breakfast may also reduce irritability and restlessness caused by ADD medication throughout the day.

To Do: Incorporate into your diet common protein sources including beef, pork, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, nuts, and dairy products.

2. Limit foods high in chemicals. Recent research suggests that a diet low in artificial dyes, preservatives, and sweeteners – which may cause increased hyperactivity and distractedness – can benefit some children with ADD.

To Do: Substitute 100 percent fruit juice for soft drinks and fruit punches colored with dyes; instead of colorful, sweet cereals, opt for dye- and preservative-free Cheerios. Bake muffins, cakes, and cookies from scratch rather than from cake mixes, many of which contain food dyes.

3. Take omega-3 fatty acids. Found in cold-water, fatty fish such as sardines, tuna, and salmon, omega-3s can increase the level of dopamine in the brain, improving mental focus. There are two main types of omega-3 fatty acids in fish oil: eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).

To Do: To get the most benefit, some experts recommend taking a supplement that has at least three times the amount of EPA to DHA.

4. Avoid “trigger” foods. Some studies suggest that sensitivities to certain foods may worsen symptoms in children with ADHD. An elimination diet can help you target these trouble foods.

To Do: Start by eating foods unlikely to cause reactions: lamb, chicken, potatoes, rice, bananas, apples, cucumbers, celery, carrots, broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower. Then restore other foods, one at a time, to see whether they cause increased fidgetiness or sleep troubles. If your child is fond of any eliminated foods, reintroduce them again a year later. Children often outgrow food sensitivities, if not repeatedly exposed to the trigger food.

5. Watch the sugar. Many parents of children with ADHD believe that sugar has a negative effect on behavior—despite several studies that conclude otherwise. In any case, sugar carries loads of calories and has no real nutritional value. People who eat lots of sweets may be missing out on essential nutrients that can keep them calm and focused.

To Do: Since ADD medications tend to blunt the appetite, it's important to make every calorie count by reducing your child's daily sugar intake.