

ADHD & Nutrition

It's frequently difficult to turn on the television or to flip through a magazine without stumbling upon a story about how someone's child has been afflicted with ADHD. Yes, unfortunately, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder has become much too common in the current world. ADHD affects both children and adults, though most new cases are pediatric diagnoses. Children with ADHD typically struggle with paying attention or concentrating. They have a hard time following directions and tend to become easily bored or frustrated with certain tasks. They also tend to move constantly and act on impulse. You often hear parents griping that their child cannot concentrate on simple tasks, such as doing homework.

Although these behaviors are generally common in healthy, normal children, they occur more often than usual and are more severe in a child with ADHD. Experts agree that some adults do not grow out of ADHD and may have difficulty with time management, organizational skills, goal setting, and employment in their grown-up lives. These adults may also have problems with relationships, self-esteem, and addictions.

Let's examine the causes of ADHD. Although the exact cause of ADHD is unknown, ongoing brain research has led scientists to the following factors:

- Genetic: The fact that ADHD tends to run in families suggests that it can be inherited.
- Chemical imbalance: Some research has shown that an imbalance of neurotransmitters may contribute to ADHD.
- Brain changes: Areas of the brain that control attention are thought to be less active with children who have ADHD.
- Head Injury: Research has shown those who have suffered a brain injury or concussion have symptoms that mimic ADHD.

Lifestyle/Environmental Impact

Certain lifestyle trends and habits may contribute to the increase or decline of ADHD symptoms. Poor [nutrition](#), infections, and substance abuse (including cigarette and alcohol use) during [pregnancy](#) may be contributing factors. Substance abuse during pregnancy is believed to affect the development of the fetus's brain.

Exposure to toxins, such as lead, in early childhood can also affect brain development. But contrary to common opinion, excessive video game playing or television watching does not cause ADHD. Likewise, eating too much sugar does not cause ADHD. But a balanced diet, rich in nutrients, is essential for babies and children to develop.

We all know that diet and nutrition play an integral part in our health. The Feingold Diet is a common resource for parents who have children with ADHD, as well as adults who are looking to manage their ADHD. The diet was created by Dr. Ben F. Feingold a prominent pediatrician and allergist, who was the Chief of Allergy at the Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in San Francisco. As he worked with patients he suspected of being sensitive to aspirin, he began to notice that they also reacted to some foods and food additives. He found, to his surprise, that not only did some people have physical reactions, but many experienced changes in their behavior.

Although it is well-known that stimulants like alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, and recreational drugs can affect behavior, most people don't consider that food additives may have the same effect. To treat hyperactivity in both adults and children, the Feingold Diet is centered on eliminating unnatural chemicals in food. Results have shown that Dr. Feingold's diet has been able to help over 70% of his patients with hyperactivity. Food chemicals are not new, but years ago people were only exposed to them sporadically. Unfortunately, today's children are exposed to harmful food chemicals every day. In order to minimize the amount of chemicals your children consume, be sure to purchase quality, all-natural, additive-free beef, poultry, seafood and produce.

The goal of the Feingold Program is to eliminate these additives:

- Artificial (synthetic) coloring and dyes
- Artificial (synthetic) flavoring
- Aspartame (NutraSweet, an artificial sweetener)
- Artificial (synthetic) preservatives BHA, BHT, TBHQ

In further research, some doctors have concluded that while not all children with ADHD are deficient in omega-3 fatty acids, the addition of omega-3 fatty acids to the diet may be important for some ADHD children. Parents of ADHD children and ADHD adults who wish to utilize omega-3 fatty acids as a method of modifying behavior, should use both flax and seafood sources of these omega-3 fatty acids. DHA — a vital omega-3 fatty acid — is found in abundance in seafood, and appears to be helpful in modifying the behavior of those with ADHD.

It's now well accepted that modifying the diet of those afflicted with ADHD can greatly help control the symptoms.

Supplementation

In a perfect world, when treating ADHD one would be able to obtain all of our essential nutrients through the consumption of food alone. Unfortunately, the reality is that in this modern fast-paced world, it is nearly impossible to meet the daily nutrient requirements through food alone. The supplement industry can be overwhelming to parents who are looking for additional resources for treating ADHD.

Here are the top supplement recommendations. Remember, supplements are intended to be used in addition to a healthy diet rich in lean protein, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and heart-healthy fats. Make sure they are manufactured by a company with NPA's certification for good manufacturing practices. Additional supplements may be recommended by your doctor.



- Krill or Fish oil - essential source of omega 3 fatty acids, for brain function and development.
- Multivitamin - to ensure all vitamin and mineral requirements are met daily.
- Super Greens and/or Resveratrol - pure form of antioxidants to ensure that the body is in a state of balance and boost immunity.