

How Your Child's Diet Can Affect Behaviour

Is your child having difficulties in school with short attention span, restlessness, poor concentration, mood swings, and possible hyperactivity? Children who are unable to stay seated, who are impulsive, and have difficulty following instructions may be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

ADD is becoming a very common "label" for children and even some adults. The typical symptoms are lack of concentration, shortened memory and attention span, difficulty writing and reading, impulsiveness, and being easily distracted. The usual medical prescription is Ritalin. Some children respond well to this medication, but others do not. In any case, the underlying cause of the behaviour disorder should be considered rather than just treating the symptoms. Often, dietary factors such as food additives, sugar consumption, food allergies, and nutrient deficiencies contribute to and even cause behaviour problems.

In today's fast paced society, the typical Canadian diet has become full of fast foods, refined carbohydrates, processed and packaged foods, as well as excessive sweets. Where has the healthy, wholesome, home-cooking gone? A nutrient-deficient diet rich in saturated fats, artificial colorings, preservatives, refined flour products and sugar all contribute to learning disorders, obesity, and subsequent health conditions.

The first step to healing your child is to feed him or her whole foods including fresh fruits and vegetables, leafy green vegetables, chicken or turkey (not processed/packaged), fresh fruit, beans and legumes, and whole grains (millet, oatmeal, brown rice, rye, spelt, quinoa). Eliminate sugars, such as pop, candy, and fruit punches, as well as refined flour products (white bread), since destructive-aggressive behaviour is significantly correlated with the amount of sugar consumed. Also, avoid processed cheese and luncheon meats (cold meats, bologna), which are full of cancer-causing nitrates and other harmful preservatives.

The next step is to determine food allergies or sensitivities your child may have. Since refined flour products (bread, pasta, cereal, cookies, etc) and dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt) are typically overly consumed on a daily basis, there is a greater likelihood of developing an allergy to these foods. Wheat and dairy sensitivities are significantly related to learning disorders, mood fluctuations, behavioural conditions, as well as digestive disorders.

Finally, your child may be suffering from a nutrient deficiency. The most crucial nutrient lacking in these children is omega-3 fatty acids such as fish oil and flax seed oil. Essential fatty acids are necessary for nerve transmission in the brain, growth and development, healthy skin, heart, and immune system, as well as hormone regulation. A tablespoon a day of Cod Liver Oil (Carlson's Norwegian Cod Liver Oil) gives your child not only the benefits of essential fatty acids, but also Vitamin D (the sunlight vitamin!), a necessary nutrient for us westcoasters.

Dr. Jeannie Doig, HBSc, ND
Naturopathic Physician

www.drjeannedoig.com
Port Alberni (250) 723-9888
Tofino & Ucluelet (250) 522-0033

Vitamin B6 is another important nutrient in treating ADD. It is beneficial for mood disorders, hyperactivity and neurological conditions. It is best to take adequate B6 in a multi-B complex vitamin.

If your child has a sweet tooth and craves anything full of sugar, there could be a chromium deficiency, which could impair blood sugar regulation. Over time, a diet high in sugar and fats could cause diabetes in young children. Supplementing with chromium can help balance blood sugar levels and curb sweet cravings. Also, eating regular well-balanced meals and snacks (every 3-4 hours) with sufficient protein at each meal can help reduce sugar cravings.

Homeopathic remedies are also a highly effective method of treating ADD and other behavioural disorders. As each person is different, it is necessary to find the specific remedy for the totality of symptoms presented for each individual. In order to achieve this, an individualized assessment would be beneficial.

As you can see, there are many factors which can contribute to learning disorders and eventually can lead to serious health conditions over time. There is no better time than the present to make the appropriate dietary and lifestyle changes for the health of you and your family.