

SUMMIT

# Naturopathic News

## Nutrition for Kids

All parents want to do what is best for their children. We would never intentionally harm them. Most parents strive to get their children the best possible care, ensure their safety at home and outside, read to them, play with them, get them to bed on time, and give them adequate discipline and responsibilities when appropriate. Yet when it comes to eating, kids are often finicky and eat nothing but macaroni & cheese, pizza, chicken fingers, sugar cereal, or cookies and milk – *and we let them.*

Then we begin to notice how often our kids have to go to the doctor. They are coming down with recurrent ear infections, runny noses, stomach aches, and allergies, getting labeled with psychiatric diagnoses such as ADHD, or going on to develop once-rare autoimmune diseases. When we go to the doctor, the standard of care is to prescribe yet another round of antibiotics, or a stimulant drug, or some other drug that will combat those persistent symptoms. In a study of more than 200,000 preschoolers in three different health care settings, about 12% were prescribed stimulant drugs, and 90% of these prescriptions were for Ritalin®. Even more frightening, from 1991 to 1995, the use of Ritalin® tripled in 2 to 4 year olds, and by 1997, 2 million US children were being treated with stimulants. We assume that since we see the same thing happening with friends and family, it is par for the course in raising children today. But what is happening in these children is not normal for humans, or any other species that eat a nutrient-rich diet. Well-intentioned parents unknowingly inflict health risks, mood & behavior problems, and worse upon their children – without ever suspecting it.

It doesn't have to be this way. Scientific inquiry has proven that the human immune system, body and brain are capable of intelligent self-repair & development, and powerful self-defense against invading microbes, or the development of chronic diseases. The system just needs the proper tools to be able to perform these tasks, and work at its best. When children eat junk food instead of nutrient-rich vegetables and fruit, we see the problems that we are seeing today.

Recent advances in understanding the physiological and biochemical roots of childhood illness, mood and behavior problems, allows for most of them to be managed with nutritional therapies that don't have the adverse side effects of the prescription drugs. Many if not all of the drugs used to treat ADHD have poor benefit-risk profiles. Preliminary research presented this year at a continuing education seminar in Boulder proves that nutrients which support the membrane integrity of the brain and nervous system, are effective in optimizing proper mood, learning potential, behavior, as well as immune system enhancement. These nutrients include various essential fatty acids, phospho-lipid components, healthy cholesterol and proteins (amino acids), antioxidant and B-vitamins, zinc, and phytochemicals that improve brain circulation. Children are far better served by using nutrients first, and turning to pharmaceuticals only as a last resort.

### Essential Fatty Acids (EFA's) and Healthy Cholesterol

It may be beneficial to think of omega-3 EFA's as an essential nutrient for kids – one worth supplementing. In studies that compare children with ADHD symptoms, temper tantrums, learning disabilities and sleep disturbances, with those who don't, the children with problems are more likely to have low levels of the omega-3 fatty acid DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) and the saturated fatty acid AA (arachidonic acid). Adults show the same thing.

Not only good for brain function, the omega-3 fatty acids DHA and EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) are required for the production of eicosanoids in the body that support the immune system, and decrease inflammation (in the cardiovascular system, joints, and elsewhere). Is it any wonder that the same developed countries that have diets lacking in sufficient omega-3 essential fatty acids, have rampant heart disease, arthritis, other inflammatory disorders, and diseases afflicting the brain and nervous system?

Read labels: fried oils, anything with hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils (even if they came from a good omega-3 source, such as sunflower seeds) – is having the opposite effect of the omega-3's in your body. When present in excess, even the essential fatty acid omega-6 oils can lead to pro-inflammatory eicosanoids that can be harmful to the brain and its function.

And yes, I said healthy cholesterol. Moderate amounts of unoxidized cholesterol (that means runny yolks on the eggs) and even the saturated fat Arachidonic Acid (which you will find in butter, and grandma's chicken soup), are necessary for proper brain, and immune function. People need to know where to find these essential fats, and which ones to moderate. The preponderance of promotion for junk food, and lack of education about nutrient-rich foods is killing us.

### **General Nutritional and Dietary Considerations**

Iron and zinc are two minerals that have been researched for their effectiveness in learning, brain health and immune function, but proper dosages of these is important, since excessive doses of iron can be harmful.

Recently researched, are nutrients phosphatidyl-serine, phosphatidyl-choline, and glycerol-phospho-choline (GPC), which make up nerve and brain cell membranes, and appear vital to neurotransmitter systems, brain metabolism, connections between brain cells, and fluidity of the membranes. B-vitamins, which can be found in whole grains and raw green vegetables, along with proteins such as carnitine, facilitate the cell's mitochondria in creating energy. They have also been studied for their roles in brain health.

Antioxidant vitamins (A, C, E, selenium, and alpha-lipoic acid) are important for maintaining not only a healthy immune system, but also healthy brain membranes. Proteins that form various hormones and neurotransmitters, such as phenylalanine, (5-hydroxy)-tryptophan, carnitine, tyrosine, glutamine and taurine, can also have researched effects on mood and behavior.

Finally, herbs can help the immune system and brain health. Echinacea and goldenseal get the most attention, but there are many other herbs whose phytochemicals act as either antimicrobials – such as osha, Oregon grape root, usnea lichen, garlic and onion – and those that stimulate the immune system – such as astragalus, reishi and shitake mushrooms. Other herbs are great for improving blood flow to the brain such as ginkgo, gotu-kola, rosemary and ginger. Still others strengthen brain membranes, such as the bioflavonoids and flavones found in any colorful fruits and vegetables.

It is an issue of vital importance that parents, teachers, and school administrators understand that the modern diet most children are eating today, is laying the foundation for not only our children's current mood problems, behavior problems, and chronic ill health, but adult-onset cancers and other diseases. The basic guidelines are the usual "eat your vegetables," have unroasted seeds and nuts (peanuts don't count) and wild cold-water fish for your omega-3 oils (supplementing some fish oils or cod liver oil to minimize exposure to toxins in our fish). And of course, keep the bad stuff out, which includes processed sugar, nutrasweet, high-fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated and fried oils to name a few. Combining what I know as a naturopathic doctor and father, my goal is to better educate parents, so they can give their children the greatest gift of all: a *healthy, happy* and long life.