A Parent’s Guide to ADHD, Diet & Nutrition

An ADDitude Special Report on food, supplements, herbs and your child
THREE Steps to Helping Your Child Manage ADD

In the ADD World, Overwhelm Is Everywhere

ADDitude is the leading source of information and inspiration for parents of children with ADHD. We understand the daily challenges you face. Our mission is to help parents find solutions and strategies to help their children succeed at home, at school, and on the job.

The ADDitude Ask

Dear ADDitude,

I have decided to try the ADHD treatment center at the University of Wisconsin. I am a little concerned about how I will be able to manage my child's behavior in the midst of all the new information. What are some strategies to help me manage over the next few weeks?

Sincerely,

Overwhelmed Parent

Dear Overwhelmed Parent,

It's understandable to feel overwhelmed when trying a new treatment, especially one as complex as ADHD. Here are a few strategies to help you manage:

1. **Establish a Routine**: Consistency is key. Set a daily schedule that includes structured breaks and time for quiet moments. This can help your child feel secure and less stressed.

2. **Use Visual Aids**: Tools like calendars, timers, and visual reminders can help your child understand what's expected of them and when.

3. **Communicate with the School**: Share the strategies you're using at home with your child's teacher. This can help ensure consistent management at all times.

4. **Seek Support**: Join a support group or talk to other parents who have gone through similar experiences. They can offer insights and encouragement.

5. **Take Care of Yourself**: Don't forget to prioritize your own well-being. Taking care of your mental health is crucial for handling the stress.

Remember, change takes time. Be patient with both yourself and your child. Adjustments may be needed, so keep refining what works best for your family.

Sincerely,

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Letter from the Editors

Poor eating habits don’t cause ADHD, but the smarter you eat, the better you feel. With busy schedules and conflicting information, it can be hard to know where to start — and even harder to keep up with a strict diet. That’s where this Special Report comes in.

In this comprehensive seven-part guide, we take a look into every aspect of the ideal ADHD diet: must-know nutrition information, what to eat, what not to eat, how vitamins and supplements work, and how to deal with a picky eater. Plus, we’ve included recipes for every meal and ADHD-friendly meal preparation tips, so you’ll know exactly what to cook for the best results.

Whether you’re looking at diet to supplement a medication plan, or as a stand-alone alternative treatment, this Special Report contains everything you need to get the best results for you and your child. Bon appetit!

Sincerely,
The ADDitude editors
A Parent’s Guide to ADHD, Diet & Nutrition

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Must-Know Strategies About ADHD and Diet: A Checklist

Eating a healthy, nutritious diet optimizes the ADHD brain and may help reduce symptoms. According to Sandy Newmark, M.D., the author of *ADHD Without Drugs* and the medical director of the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, there are important ADHD-specific strategies that adults diagnosed with ADHD and parents raising a child with ADHD should know. Each of these strategies will be discussed in greater depth later in this Special Report, but they are important enough to highlight at the top.

1. **Avoid artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives in processed foods.** They aren’t really food; our bodies did not evolve to tolerate them. Avoid them as much as possible. Also avoid certain preservatives such as nitrites, BHA and BHT, sodium benzoate, and artificial sweeteners.

2. **Consider an elimination diet.** Food sensitivities and allergies are surprisingly common in children with ADHD. According to Newmark, 25 to 50 percent of all children with ADHD have some kind of sensitivity or allergy to dairy, gluten, corn, soy, eggs, nuts, citrus, or any product with artificial colors, flavors, or preservatives.

   The only real way to know if a certain food is affecting the hyperactivity, concentration, or impulsiveness of your child is to remove the food from the diet and carefully observe the results by using an “elimination diet.” Work with your pediatrician or specialist when starting such a diet. See page 16 for the details on how to do it.

3. **Take an omega-3 fatty acid supplement.** Most children with ADHD would benefit from taking a daily omega-3 fatty acid supplement, says Newmark. Children with ADHD often have lower omega-3 levels than do non-ADHD children. Though the optimal dose and ratio of EPA to DHA (the most crucial omega-3s for ADHDers) varies by person, Newmark recommends the following:
   - Use a product that contains EPA and DHA
 Give 500 mg. total EPA and DHA daily to children under seven years of age

 Give 1,000 mg. a day total to children seven and up

 Teens and adults should talk with your doctor about precise dosages

4. **Test for deficiencies in key minerals — iron, zinc, and magnesium.** Children with ADHD may be low in these minerals, all of which are key to normal neurological function. All three can be accurately measured through a blood test administered by your doctor. If levels are below normal, changes in the diet as well as supplementation can correct them. This simple intervention could make a big difference in your child’s life.
Red dye #40. Gluten and casein. Refined sugar. Dairy. Each of these may lead to increased hyperactivity, decreased focus, and other health and behavior complications in some children with ADHD. But each child is different, and what exacerbates symptoms in one may not cause any discernible difference in another. Following are some of the most common dietary triggers for ADHD symptoms; work with your child’s doctor to determine the best way to test your child’s sensitivities to the foods below:

1. ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS & PRESERVATIVES: THE FEINGOLD DIET

In the 1970s, Benjamin Feingold, M.D., a pediatrician and allergist at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in San Francisco, introduced an eating plan that he said could help alleviate symptoms of ADHD. The Feingold diet forbids artificial food colors, flavorings, sweeteners, and preservatives, as well as salicylates, naturally occurring compounds found in some fruits and vegetables.

Studies failed to uphold Feingold’s claims when he first made them, and most ADHD experts still dismiss the Feingold diet as ineffective. Yet a recent research study suggests that the Feingold diet may be beneficial to the 5 percent or so of children with ADHD who are sensitive to chemicals in food.

This study, published in the December 2004 issue of the Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, analyzed 15 previously published studies and concluded that artificial food colors can lead to hyperactivity, irritability, and insomnia in some kids with ADHD. In Europe, foods that have certain artificial colors must carry a warning label stating that the product can cause hyperactivity and inattention.

Many parents who use the Feingold diet swear by its benefits for their kids. Marilee Jones of Oakdale, Connecticut, put her son, now 17, on the Feingold diet when he was a toddler. Before the diet, he was hyperactive and had dark circles under his eyes from not sleeping. “We put him on the diet, and everything changed. He became a normal 18-month-old,” says Jones, who now works for the Feingold Association.

“Every child is different, and what exacerbates symptoms in one may make no difference in another.”
Even now, says Jones, her son notices that if he strays too far from the diet and, say, indulges in a soft drink with artificial food coloring, his personality changes.

2. SUGAR

Regardless of the scientific evidence for or against the Feingold Diet, anecdotal evidence suggests Dr. Feingold may have been on to something regarding sugar. Anyone who’s worked with kids will tell you that they’re hardest to control on Valentine’s Day or the day after Halloween. Why? They’re filled to the brim with candy, and candy is loaded with processed sugar — a simple carbohydrate that provides quick bursts of energy that burn out quickly. While the evidence on sugar’s link to attention problems is inconclusive, some studies suggest that some ADHDers are particularly “turned on” by sugar and demonstrate increased hyperactivity, inattentiveness, and impulsivity after consuming it.

If you’re looking to decrease or cut out sugar from your diet, be aware that sugar hides in foods under various names, including:

- Corn sweetener
- Corn syrup
- Corn syrup solids
- Dehydrated cane juice
- Dextrin
- Dextrose
- Maltodextrin
- Malt syrup
- Maltose
- Molasses
- Rice syrup
- Saccharose
- Sorghum or sorghum syrup
- Sucrose
If you have children with ADHD, cutting out birthday cupcakes and Girl Scout cookies can be excruciating. Make the transition easier for them by following these rules:

1. **Manage the candy** your child brings home. If it’s a special occasion like Halloween or Christmas, make a deal beforehand about exactly how much candy he can consume each day and put a limit on how many days this can go on. Or you can “buy” the candy from your child, so he can purchase something else he really wants.

2. **Set a good example** at Halloween by giving out sugar-free chewing gum — or inedible items, like fancy pencils or nickels or dimes. If candy is a must, then look for white peppermints sweetened with sorbitol.

3. **Substitute nuts**, a platter of fresh veggies, or colorful fruits with tasty dips for the chocolate candies and cake served at gatherings.

4. **Instead of super sugary cookies**, try Pepperidge Farm Chessmen — one of the few commercial varieties on the market low in sugar and free of food dyes. Or better yet, make your own cookies if you have time. A homemade oatmeal raisin cookie or bar can be a much healthier alternative to packaged sweets. There are even some brownie mixes with healthy ingredients and significantly less sugar than many store-bought desserts.

5. **Serve chilled punch**, made with 100 percent fruit juice, in brightly colored cups when your child wants something sweet. Avoid fruit “drinks” or “cocktails,” both of which are higher in sugar. When serving juice, try diluting it to ¼ to ½ strength with water, and accompany it with sandwiches made of meats or poultry on whole-grain bread. The protein in the meat and the fiber in the whole grain will help maintain steady blood sugar levels.

3. **ALLERGIES AND SENSITIVITIES**

A few years ago, The Lancet published the results of a study that gauged diet’s effect on ADHD symptoms. Researchers recruited 100 children with ADHD, and placed 50 of them on a restricted diet, consisting mainly of rice, meat, vegetables, pears, and water, with some children getting a few other foods. The other 50, the control group, received a normal diet. At the end of five weeks, 64 percent of the children on the restricted diet had significant improvement in their ADHD symptoms, while none of the control group had improved.
Four other studies, all done since the 1980s, have shown similar results. Eliminating certain foods from the diet can significantly help some people with ADHD who are more sensitive to common trigger foods.

It is important to distinguish between food *sensitivities* and food *allergies*. A *food allergy* is an allergic reaction to a certain food that can be detected by a skin or blood test. Most people with ADHD do not have food allergies, although some might. If you suspect you or your child has a food allergy, go to a doctor right away, as some can be life threatening.

*A food sensitivity* is evident when a food causes some type of physical or behavioral symptom in a person, but no true allergy can be found through testing methods. Food sensitivity can cause stomachaches, rashes, headaches, or, in the case of ADHD, increased hyperactivity, impulsivity, and lack of concentration. A negative blood or skin test for food allergies does not mean that a food sensitivity does not exist.

**Eliminate the Problem**

The best way to find out if you or your child has a food sensitivity is through an elimination diet, in which one or more foods is removed for a period of time in order to see if there is an improvement in ADHD symptoms. There are three types of elimination diets:

1) The “oligoantigenic” or “few foods” diet is strict, eliminating nearly all foods except a limited number that generally cause no problems. This diet is mainly used in research studies. If you’re looking to do it yourself, it may be difficult, but it can be done. An oligoantigenic diet consists solely of:

- Lamb
- Chicken
- Potatoes
- Rice
- Bananas
- Apples
- Cucumbers
- Celery
Carrots
Parsnips
Cabbage
Cauliflower
Broccoli
Salt
Pepper
Vitamin supplements

2) The multiple-food elimination diet is a less strict option that removes foods that most commonly cause food sensitivities. A commonly used version eliminates dairy products, wheat, corn, soy, eggs, nuts, citrus, and artificial colors and flavors.

3) The single-food elimination diet removes only one or two foods at a time.

**DIY Elimination Diets**

Most ADHD adults or parents of ADHD children find it easiest to try a variation on a single-food elimination diet, which can be undertaken at home without help from a dietician. If you believe that one or two foods may be affecting you or your child, eliminate those foods for three weeks. Sandy Newmark, M.D., typically recommends that the parent begin by eliminating dairy or gluten to start, as they cause the most common problems.

If you see improvement in focus, behavior, and other classic ADHD symptoms, add the food or foods back. If you eliminated several foods at once, add them back one at a time. If behavior is better when the food isn’t being eaten, and worse when it is, you have your answer!

Don’t get discouraged if life gets in the way of your elimination diet. Most successful patients have to try the elimination process a few times before they figure out if they’re really experiencing a food sensitivity or if other negative incidents got in the way — perhaps a sleepless night caused your lack of focus, not the gluten you ate for breakfast. It’s best to do elimination diets when your life is as stable as possible, so try not to do them at the beginning of the school year or before a big move.

“Perhaps a sleepless night caused your lack of focus, not the gluten you ate for breakfast.”
How Well Will It Work For You?

Unfortunately, there is no easy way to diagnose someone for food sensitivity. In many cases, if a patient has allergies, eczema, or gastrointestinal problems, he is more likely to have food sensitivity. But this isn’t always the case — some patients who are otherwise healthy also respond positively to an elimination diet.

So far, there isn’t a lab test to determine food sensitivity. Some practitioners use food sensitivity tests to measure levels of immunoglobulin G antibodies to foods, but these have not been proven to be reliable. In the end, doctors have to remove suspected foods and observe the resulting behavior.

Whenever possible, determining food sensitivity in yourself or your child should be done under the supervision of a medical doctor or nutritionist, who can help you select the best diet and monitor the results. The only exception, as mentioned above, would be if you were doing a single-food elimination diet. Even then, it is important to be strict about the foods you are eliminating and to monitor results carefully. Use a calendar or computer program to help log regular notes.

“I have seen hundreds of kids with ADHD,” says Dr. Newmark, “and many respond well to an elimination diet. Families who have had success are happy that they can maximize their child’s potential.”

4. FOOD DYES

Some studies (published in The Lancet, Pediatrics, and Journal of Pediatrics) suggest that artificial food dyes and flavors may contribute to ADHD symptoms, particularly in children. No similar studies have been done on adults, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the link between food dyes and hyperactivity may continue beyond adolescence.

If you think food dyes are compromising your or your child’s ability to focus, try this for one week: Avoid foods and drinks that list on their labels U.S. certified color Red #40, Blue #2, Yellow #5 (Tartrazine), Yellow #6 (Sunset Yellow), as well as sodium benzoate, a common preservative. Observe your child’s behavior, or if you’re conducting the test on yourself, have a spouse or close friend observe you. Are you or your child more likely to sit still or see tasks through to completion? Take notes on specific activities, if you find it helpful.

After a week, reintroduce artificial dyes by squeezing a few drops of food coloring into a glass of water and having yourself or your child drink it. Observe behavior for two or three hours. If there is no change, try drinking

RESOURCE

For Parents of Kids with Allergies: Eatright.org
a second glass. If you or your child becomes significantly more hyperactive within a few hours, it’s likely that you’re experiencing a reaction to the artificial dyes.

If you think you’re having negative reactions to artificial dyes, it’s best to wean yourself off of them. But be aware that they can lurk where you least expect them! Here are some tips to make the transition easier:

1) Substitute 100 percent fruit juices — or better yet, plain water — for soft drinks, sports drinks, and “fruit punches,” all of which are typically filled with artificial colors and flavors.

2) Bake your own desserts, if you can. Cake mixes and store-bought cookies often have artificial colors. If you’re not a baker but still enjoy a sweet treat every now and then, reach for the Pepperidge Farm Chessmen cookies, which are free of dyes and relatively low in sugar.

3) Unsurprisingly, the more colorful the cereal, the more food dye it contains! Steer clear of any unnaturally bright cereals like Fruity Pebbles, Cap’n Crunch, or Apple Jacks, which are all loaded with artificial colors. Instead, go for Cheerios, which are free of artificial dyes, flavors, and preservatives. Many snacks, such as Cheetos, have artificial colors as well.

4) Check your condiments! Barbecue sauces, mustard, and some ketchup products can contain artificial dyes.

5) Think beyond food. Artificial dyes lurk in a lot of products we use every day, like toothpaste, mouthwash, or even medicine. If you’re serious about eliminating dyes from your or your child’s diet, make sure you check the ingredient list on any product that goes in your mouth.

Not all food coloring comes from artificial sources — and natural food colorings don’t have the potential to cause hyperactivity. If your food looks like it’s been colored, check the ingredients list — if it’s been colored with any of these natural coloring agents, it’s okay to eat:

- Annatto
- Anthocyanin
- Beta carotene
- Caramel
- Carmine (note for vegans: carmine is made from the cochineal bug, and is thus considered non-vegan)
• Chlorophyll
• Paprika
• Red beets
• Saffron
• Turmeric

5. PESTICIDES
Evidence suggests that pesticide exposure increases the likelihood of a child having ADHD. In one study of more than 1,100 children\(^6\), those with high levels of pesticides in their urine were more than twice as likely to have ADHD as were those with low levels. So far, however, no research shows that decreasing pesticide exposure will improve ADHD symptoms in children or adults who already have ADHD.

Dr. Newmark recommends that anyone with ADHD limit pesticide exposure as much as possible. Buy organic food, especially fruits and vegetables, if you can afford it. Avoid foods with the highest levels of pesticides.

If you can’t afford to buy organic or can’t find all the organic produce you need, washing fruits and vegetables removes some of the pesticide residue, as does peeling. Some offerings in the produce aisle are bigger culprits than others — check out this list from the Environmental Working Group:

The “Dirty Dozen” — Fruits and Vegetables with the Most Pesticides:
• Apples
• Celery
• Cherry Tomatoes
• Cucumbers
• Grapes
• Nectarines
• Peaches
• Potatoes
• Snap Peas
• Spinach
• Strawberries
• Sweet Bell Peppers

The “Clean Fifteen” — Fruits and Vegetables with the Fewest Pesticides:
• Asparagus
• Avocados
• Cabbage
• Cantaloupe
• Cauliflower
• Eggplant
• Grapefruit
• Kiwi
• Mangoes
• Onions
• Papayas
• Pineapples
• Sweet Corn
• Sweet Peas (frozen)
• Sweet Potatoes
Sandy Newmark, M.D. believes that one of the single biggest factors contributing to ADHD behavior problems is lack of proper nutrition. We too often allow a child with ADHD to start his day eating sugar — in various breakfast disguises. And the lunches our kids eat at school are, for the most part, equally disastrous. It’s no wonder that so many kids have a hard time sitting still, concentrating, and learning.

Good nutrition is crucial for any child or adult with ADHD. Here are eight dietary essentials for any child or adult with attention deficit:

1. BALANCED MEALS

We all know it’s smart to “eat a balanced diet” — but what does that really mean? To put it simply, a balanced diet includes food from the good parts of the food pyramid: vegetables, complex carbohydrates, protein, and fruit. Not every meal needs to be perfectly balanced — as long as your overall diet evens out — but many ADHDers find it easier to track their nutrients on a day-by-day or meal-by-meal basis.

Not sure how to do that? Ned Hallowell, M.D., advises his patients to follow this simple rule: ¼ of your plate should be protein, ¼ should be carbohydrates — aim for mostly whole grains here or vegetable sources of carbohydrates like sweet potatoes. The last half should be fruits and vegetables — as the two most important food groups, they should take up the most space on your plate.

2. PROTEIN: WAKE UP A SLEEPY ADHD BRAIN

Foods rich in protein — lean beef, pork, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, nuts, soy, and dairy products — can have beneficial effects on ADHD symptoms. Your body uses protein for many functions, one of the most important of which is to make neurotransmitters, the chemicals used by brain cells to communicate with each other. When they’re in balance and communicating harmoniously, you can focus better on work or school.

Since your body releases these brain-awakening neurotransmitters when you eat protein, it’s important to eat a protein-rich breakfast to start your day. Aim to eat within 30 minutes after getting out of bed — this has the
added bonus of kick-starting your metabolism so you’re burning more calories throughout the day! For protein-filled breakfast ideas, check out our suggestions in the “Meal Ideas” chapter.

Try to spread your protein intake evenly throughout the day. If you eat an entire day’s worth at once, your body won’t be able to process it all and the majority will just get washed out. Excessive protein intake can actually have a negative effect on your kidneys and increase your blood sugar.

According to Newmark, ideal protein levels are as follows:

- **Children:** 0.50 gram of protein per pound of body weight. If a child weighs 40 pounds, he should consume 20 grams of protein a day.
- **Adults:** 0.36 gram of protein per pound of body weight. If an adult weighs 150 pounds, he should consume 54 grams of protein daily.

When protein is consumed properly, it has the added bonus of digesting slowly, keeping blood sugar steady and level throughout the day — increasing the chances of maintaining focus and staying calm.

### Protein Primer

Each of the foods listed below has between six and eight grams or more of protein — or about 15 percent of an adult’s daily requirement. Mix them up as much as possible to vary your nutrients.

- 1 ounce lean meat, fish, poultry, cheese, or soy-based meat substitutes
- 1 cup (8 ounces) of milk, yogurt, or soy-based dairy substitutes; a cup of Greek yogurt has between 13 and 20 grams of protein
- 1 extra large egg
- ½ cup legumes (like beans or lentils)
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter or almond better
- 1 oz. peanuts, almonds, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds

### 3. GOOD FATS: WHAT THE ADHD BRAIN NEEDS

For years, fat was labeled the enemy, leading to a surge in “fat free” products that, in most cases, replaced the fat with sugar or refined flour. (Sugar is often an even unhealthier option, especially for those who are prone to hyperactivity.) Now, however, dieticians are recognizing that a blanket ban on fat wasn’t right for the American diet — and it’s particularly not good for ADHDers.

“Dieticians are recognizing that a blanket ban on fat wasn’t right for the American diet — and it’s particularly not good for ADHDers.”
“Fats make up 60 percent of the brain and of the nerves that run every system in the body,” says William Sears, M.D., an associate clinical professor of pediatrics at the University of California, Irvine, School of Medicine. Fat is necessary for a healthy ADHD diet and for proper brain function — it just has to be the right fat. As Dr. Sears says, “The better the fat in the diet, the better the brain will function.”

So what makes something a good or a bad fat? We’ll start with the bad:

**A. TRANS FATS**

*Trans fats,* which are slowly being phased out of the American diet, are widely considered the worst type of fat you can eat. The reason? They rarely occur in natural whole foods, so they’re almost entirely artificial — which causes them to react with your body in unhealthy ways. Unlike other fats, trans fats manage to both raise bad cholesterol and lower good cholesterol.

So where do these unhealthy fats live? Mostly in processed foods. Since trans fats add an addictive greasy flavor and also stop food from going bad, the processed food industry adds them wherever they can: to fast food, snack foods like potato chips, fried food, and processed baked goods. Margarine, shortening, coffee creamer, and refrigerated dough also usually contain trans fats. The FDA only requires food manufacturers to list trans fats if they exceed a certain amount, so you could be eating trans fats even if they’re not listed on the label. How can you protect yourself and your family from these unhealthy, hard-to-identify fats? When checking food labels, look for the phrase “partially hydrogenated vegetable oil” in the ingredients — the phrase is food industry lingo for “trans fats.” Don’t buy any food that has partially hydrogenated oils.

**B. SATURATED FATS**

*Saturated fats,* the fats that are found in meat, butter, and cheese, are still a source of great debate. For years, scientists thought that overconsumption of saturated fats raised “bad cholesterol” and put patients at greater risk for heart disease. However, dozens of recent studies show no link between saturated fat and heart disease, and have even shown that while saturated fat does occasionally raise “bad cholesterol,” it can actually raise “good cholesterol,” too. As Newmark says, there is still a great deal of controversy on this subject and there are no hard and fast conclusions about saturated fat.

Your best bet? Saturated fats can be eaten in moderation as part of a healthy diet — so don’t start slathering your steak with butter yet. Small amounts of saturated fat from lean meats, yogurt, and unprocessed cheese are OK. Just aim for moderation!
C. UNSATURATED FATS

Unsaturated fats are the epitome of “good fats,” and they’re the ones you should include in your diet as much as possible. Unsaturated fats come from nuts, certain unprocessed vegetable oils (reach for canola or olive oil when you’re cooking), fish, and avocado. Unsaturated fats are chock full of Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids, and they help your body absorb vitamins and nutrients from other foods — which explains why a totally fat-free diet isn’t the right choice.

Studies have shown that eating unsaturated fats improves blood cholesterol (raising good cholesterol and lowering bad) and may even lower your risk of heart disease — all while giving your ADHD brain the energy it needs. A well-nourished brain, fed with plenty of healthy fats, has been shown to boost focus and cognitive function.

4. VEGETABLES

When it comes to vegetables, there’s no such thing as too much. Not only are veggies high in vitamins and fiber and generally low in calories, they’re also incredibly versatile. Vegetables are a staple in most cuisines around the world, and healthy diets always rely heavily on them.

When selecting veggies, aim for a variety of colors, from red to green to yellow to purple. Different colors indicate different nutrients, so it’s important to mix it up as much as possible.

(If your child refuses to eat veggies, check out the chapter “Dealing With a Picky Eater” for tips on keeping her diet healthy.)

5. FRUIT

Fruit is nature’s candy — back when our ancestors walked the earth (before the rise of processed food), a piece of fruit was their only choice for a sweet treat. Nowadays, an apple may not completely satisfy your sweet tooth, but bumping up your fruit intake will boost vitamins and nutrients, and can give you natural relief when you’re craving something sweet. Try a homemade smoothie to get multiple servings of fruit in one healthy and sweet cup. Add yogurt or protein powder to increase protein levels.

Most fruits are high in antioxidants, which protect the body against “free radicals,” —molecules that can attack and damage healthy cells. A recent study found that children with ADHD have high levels of nitric oxide, a cell-damaging free radical, and low levels of superoxide dismutase, an enzyme that protects against free radicals. While more research is needed, this study suggests that those with ADHD may be more sensitive to damage caused by
free radicals — and may be in greater need of antioxidants than are people without the condition.

6. WATER

Make sure you’re drinking plenty of water! A human can survive for a month or more without eating food, but only about a week without drinking water. Your brain is up to 80 percent water, and in order to keep it running smoothly, it needs to stay hydrated at all times.

Usually, your body will alert you that it needs more water by feeling thirsty, but not always. Too much sugar, caffeine, or alcohol can dehydrate you — without always giving you proper warning. To make sure you’re getting enough water, aim to consume half your weight in ounces per day, up to about 120 ounces per day. So, for example, a 150-pound adult should aim to consume about 75 ounces of water a day — or a little more than 9 cups. You can get your water from other sources, like fruits or 100 percent fruit juices, and the occasional sugar-sweetened beverage won’t kill you — as long as you aim to drink primarily plain water whenever possible.

If you don’t like the taste of water, try adding lemon or lime, or reach for a naturally flavored seltzer. In many cases, people mistakenly believe they don’t like water because they drink so many sweetened drinks that their body has become used to them — and thinks plain water is boring. Try to wean yourself off sweetened beverages by mixing water into your sweet drink a little at a time. Start with a 3:1 ratio — ¼ sweetened beverage and ¼ water — then add a little more water each day until the drink is mostly water. If you’re patient and don’t give up, your body will relearn to crave water when it’s thirsty.

If you tend to forget to drink water throughout the day, try carrying a reusable water bottle with you — one with a straw works great for hyperfocusing ADHDers. Keep it next to you all day — whether at work or at school — and take a small sip whenever you notice it’s there. You’ll get in the habit of staying hydrated in no time.

“A human can survive for a month or more without eating food, but only about a week without drinking water.”
Supplements and Herbs

Sometimes, a healthy diet isn't enough to keep ADHD symptoms under control. If you've made all the changes listed in the preceding chapters and are still having problems controlling ADHD symptoms, it may be a good idea to boost your diet with these supplements and herbs.

1. OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS

Omega-3 fatty acids are among the good unsaturated fats mentioned above. They've been extensively studied and have been shown to improve several aspects of ADHD behavior: hyperactivity, impulsivity and concentration. As a result, many doctors recommend that all patients with ADHD take omega-3 fatty acids.

Omega-3s are essential fats important for normal brain function. They are called “essential” fats because the body must get them from diet; we can't produce them ourselves. Research suggests that ADHDers have lower levels of omega-3s in their blood than do those without ADHD. So, unless you or your child is a dedicated fish eater, you’ll have to supplement, usually with fish oil, to achieve healthy levels.

A number of studies on omega-3s and ADHD have shown a positive effect. In a 2009 study from Sweden, 25 percent of children who had daily doses of omega-3s had a significant decrease in symptoms after three months; by six months, almost 50 percent experienced better symptom management. This is an impressive result for a safe nutritional supplement with few side effects.

How much omega-3 should you or your child get and in what form? It's a little complicated. The two main omega-3 fatty acids found in supplements are eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). It appears that most benefits are derived from omega-3 products that contain more EPA than DHA. Most doctors recommend a total dose of 700 to 1,000 mg a day for younger children, and 1,500 to 2,000 mg for older children and adults.

Omega-3s come in capsule, liquid, and chewable form. The gummies and chewables, unfortunately, don't have much fish oil in them, so it is expensive and time-consuming to get the proper dose. Most kids who are too young to swallow capsules can take the liquid, although you’ll have to be creative in
disguising it. It is OK to mix liquid omega-3s in just about anything. Orange juice and smoothies are a couple of favorites.

Some doctors report seeing some patients improve within a few days, while other people didn't show improvement for a few months. Our advice? Be patient, and don't to give up on an omega-3 regimen too soon.

2. IRON

Many parents, ADHD adults, and even professionals are unaware of the important role iron plays in controlling ADHD symptoms. When they think of someone who is iron deficient, they imagine a person who is pale, tired, and weak — in most cases, completely the opposite of a hyperactive ADHDer. But this is far from the truth.

A study done in 2004 showed that the average iron level of children with ADHD (measured as ferritin) was 22, compared with 44 in non-ADHD children. Another study showed that increasing a child's iron levels improved her ADHD symptoms almost as much as giving her a stimulant. The children in these studies were not anemic.

Low iron may also be a factor in Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS), a condition often found in ADHD children or adults that causes an uncomfortable tingling or crawling feeling in the legs, affecting the ability to get to sleep. In 2003, the journal Sleep reported that giving iron supplements to children with both RLS and low iron stores improved symptoms.

The fact that you or your child has a normal “blood count” does not mean that ferritin levels are normal. Because too much iron is dangerous, medical professionals do not recommend giving iron without first checking a person's ferritin level. Ask your doctor or your child's pediatrician to test it.

If your child's iron levels are below 35, talk with your doctor about how to increase them. Diet, not supplements, is the safest way to increase iron levels, so always try that path first. However, if your child is a picky eater and has a low ferritin level, Newmark recommends using a supplement right away while working on changing his diet. If iron remains low, talk to your doctor about starting an iron supplement — just make sure you never go above the recommended dose, as too much iron from supplements can be toxic.

So-called heme iron, contained in animal products, like meats, poultry, and fish, is absorbed much more efficiently than is non-heme iron, found in fortified cereals, whole grains, vegetables, legumes, and some fruits, so vegetarians may have to step up their efforts a little bit. You can increase iron
absorption by serving these foods with others high in vitamin C — orange or grapefruit juice are a good choice.

Iron-rich foods include:

- Cheerios (1 cup), 8 mg. iron
- Wheaties (1 cup), 4.5 mg.
- Beef pot roast (3 oz.), 2 mg.
- Turkey (dark meat; 3 oz.), 2 mg.
- Tuna (3 oz.), 1.9 mg.
- Peas (½ cup), 1.8 mg.
- Hamburger (lean, 3 oz.), 1.8 mg.
- Egg (1 medium) 1.1 mg.
- Chicken (1 drumstick), 1 mg.
- Banana (1 medium), 0.9 mg.
- Baked potato (1 medium), 0.7 mg.
- Peanut butter (2 tbsp.), 0.6 mg.
- Whole-wheat bread (1 slice), 0.5 mg.

Limit the servings of dairy products when serving iron-rich food. Calcium interferes with the mineral’s absorption. Two to three servings of dairy a day for kids ages four to eight, and four servings for adults and children nine to 18, can supply enough calcium without compromising iron absorption.

While double-blind studies using larger populations are needed to confirm iron’s effect on ADHD symptoms, we do know that eating more iron-rich foods can only benefit your or your child’s mental and physical health.

3. ZINC AND MAGNESIUM

Zinc and magnesium are two other minerals that may play an important role in controlling ADHD symptoms. Both are essential to normal health, and a surprising number of children and adults, with and without ADHD, don’t get enough of them.

Zinc regulates the neurotransmitter dopamine, and it may make methylphenidate more effective by improving the brain’s response to dopamine.
Taking zinc supplements may reduce hyperactivity and impulsivity, but not inattentiveness.

High levels of zinc, however, may be dangerous. Have your doctor check zinc levels before taking a supplement. If you do add a zinc supplement, Dr. Newmark suggests taking 20 mg. daily. Check with your doctor before adding a zinc supplement to your diet.

Magnesium is also used to make neurotransmitters involved in attention and concentration, and it has a calming effect on the brain. Magnesium helps with sleep and relaxation — big challenges for children and adults with ADHD. Have your doctor check your or your child's magnesium and zinc levels when you test ferritin levels.

While studies have been done on both minerals’ effects on ADHD, the results are not as clear-cut as are those analyzing omega-3s and iron.

4. VITAMIN C

Vitamin C, says Dr. Ned Hallowell, is important in modulating the neurotransmitter dopamine at the synapses in the brain. (ADHD stimulants are effective because they increase dopamine levels in the brain.) Hallowell recommends getting vitamin C from food, but if you know that you or your child doesn't eat a healthy diet, try a daily supplement.

One caution: Don't take vitamin C less than an hour before or after taking ADHD medications. It prevents the medication from being absorbed.
Cover Your Nutritional Bases

If you’re very concerned about diet — particularly your child’s — a daily multivitamin, containing the recommended daily allowance of vitamins and minerals may be your best choice for optimal brain health. Many of the multivitamin/multimineral products on the market contain sugar, preservatives, and artificial colors, which makes them a bad choice for ADHDers. Look for brands that are low in sugar with no artificial colors or flavors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vitamin</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Found In</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin A</td>
<td>Keeps skin healthy and guards against infections</td>
<td>Found in sweet potatoes, carrots, dark leafy greens, winter squash, lettuce, dried apricots, cantaloupe, bell peppers, and tropical fruits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin C</td>
<td>Helps your body absorb iron (an important nutrient for ADHDers!), heals cuts and wounds</td>
<td>Found in bell peppers, leafy greens, berries, citrus, tomatoes, peas, and papaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B1</td>
<td>Provides energy for the brain and central nervous system</td>
<td>Found in beans, artichokes, lima beans, lettuce, and spinach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B2</td>
<td>Helps our bodies grow and promotes red blood cell production</td>
<td>Found in spinach, mushrooms, Brussels sprouts, and potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B3</td>
<td>Needed for normal function of the skin, nerves, and digestive system</td>
<td>Found in peas, potatoes (any variety), asparagus, corn, and artichokes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B5</td>
<td>Regulates your sleep cycle and helps your body convert food into energy</td>
<td>Found in broccoli, avocados, mushrooms, and sweet potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B6</td>
<td>Necessary for brain function and hemoglobin production</td>
<td>Found in boiled potatoes, winter squash, and spinach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B7</td>
<td>Boosts cell growth and helps produce energy</td>
<td>Found in avocado and cauliflower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B9</td>
<td>Essential for DNA production, and may help prevent birth defects</td>
<td>Found in Brussels sprouts, lettuce, avocado, mustard greens, and peas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B12</td>
<td>Supports red blood cell production and brain function</td>
<td>Found in meat, eggs, and cheese. Vegetables and fruits are not a good source for B12, but very small amounts can be found in white mushrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin E</td>
<td>An important antioxidant, prevents damage to cells</td>
<td>Found in Swiss chard, spinach, kale, and turnip greens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin K</td>
<td>Necessary for blood clotting and other healing processes</td>
<td>Found in dandelion greens, kale, spinach, collards, broccoli rabe, and Swiss chard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. HERBS

Several herbs have been recommended for managing ADHD symptoms, including ginkgo, St. John’s Wort, rhodiola, and ginseng. Most have been poorly researched — and some, like St. John’s Wort, may be dangerous if taken improperly. There are, however, two major exceptions when it comes to ADHD.

In a large European study on hyperactivity and sleep problems\(^\text{13}\), a combination of valerian and lemon balm helped to relax children with ADH D by reducing anxiety. Valerian in particular was also shown to help the “rebound effect” that many ADHDers experience when stimulant medication wears off. Sandy Newmark, M.D., uses these herbs regularly for patients who deal with these problems. Consult a naturopathic doctor to find the appropriate dose for you or your child.

Finally, pycnogenol, an extract made from French maritime pine bark, has been shown to improve ADHD symptoms in a limited amount of research\(^\text{14}\).

One last thought from Dr. Newmark: “Herbal products vary greatly in quality, and some contain contaminants. You should find a knowledgeable professional to help you identify reliable sources of pure, standardized herbs.”

“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.
Preparing your own food is the easiest way to control what your family eats, and to make sure that you’re getting the nutrients you need. But in our busy, fast-paced world, it’s hard for neurotypical families to find the time — and it’s even harder if your family is affected by ADHD. These expert tips make dinner — or any meal — easier for adults with ADHD or parents of ADHD children to plan, prepare, and enjoy!

1. **USE A SLOW COOKER**
ADHD coach Jacqueline Sinfield recommends investing in some handy kitchen tools, particularly a slow cooker. Slow cookers get a bad rap, she says, but they’re a brilliant invention for someone with ADHD. Just throw in all the ingredients before you leave for work in the morning, and by the time you get home, dinner is ready to devour!

2. **STICK TO THEME NIGHTS**
Theme nights are a lifesaver for ADHD adults who struggle with quick decisions. If every Monday is Meatloaf Night, you’ll know exactly what you need to have in your kitchen, and exactly how long dinner prep will take. Plus, kids crave routines they can count on — they’ll love that their favorite meal (i.e. pizza) is guaranteed every Friday night!

3. **PLAN OR STARVE**
ADHD coach Terry Matlen, ACSW, came up with the “Plan or Starve” system — another easy solution for ADHDers who struggle with decision-making. Write down 10 full meal ideas on 10 index cards, complete with a shopping list on the back. If you’d like, throw in a few “wild cards” — like ordering a pizza. Keep one set of cards at home and another in your wallet or work bag. Pick one at random every morning — having a meal in mind at the beginning of the day will help you plan any shopping you may need to do after work, and dinner can get cooking the second you get home.

4. **GET ALL THE HELP YOU CAN**
Starting with your kids! “If kids can be engaged, it’s easier to get them to eat,” says Matlen. Involving your children can be extra helpful if you have picky eaters, but it also takes some of the dinner-making pressure off of parents. If your child can take charge of planning the meal, or is old enough to handle

“Kids crave routines they can count on — they’ll love that their favorite meal is guaranteed every Friday night!”
basic cooking prep tasks, they’ll be more excited to eat — and Mom won’t have to worry about a tantrum from a fussy broccoli-hater.

If the brunt of the meal-making responsibility falls on one parent, it may be time to mix up your arrangement. Don’t be afraid to ask for help, whether from your spouse, your babysitter, or even a registered dietitian. Dad could handle dinner on Monday and Wednesday, for example, and Mom could take it on Tuesday and Thursday. Fridays are pizza night, clearly. The stress won’t be concentrated all on one person, and every family member will get a chance to flex his or her cooking chops.

5. STOCK UP
A well-stocked pantry is key to eliminating dinner stress. While it’s always a good idea to have fresh produce on hand, don’t write off all frozen or canned versions. Frozen vegetables can have more nutrients than fresh ones, and since they won’t spoil if you forget they’re around — just steam and serve. Heat up canned beans in minutes and top with lettuce and salsa for easy protein-filled burritos.
Meal Ideas

Putting all of these nutrition rules into practice is easier said than done. But never fear — ADDitude has compiled ideas and suggestions for every meal of the day, from your morning snack to a quick 30-minute dinner!

1. BREAKFAST

Research suggests that a good breakfast helps children do better in school. A 1998 study, published in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*\(^\text{15}\), showed that children who ate breakfast regularly had higher reading and math scores, lower levels of depression, anxiety, and hyperactivity, better school attendance, improved attention spans, and fewer behavior problems.

For those with ADHD, the menu matters. In a 1983 study published in the *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, researchers at George Washington University tested three breakfast types (high-carbohydrate, high-protein, and no breakfast at all) on 39 children with ADHD and 44 kids without the condition.

The hyperactive kids who ate the high-carbohydrate breakfast performed significantly worse on several tests, including a test for attention, than did the children who ate the high-protein breakfast.

Unsure what to cook up for breakfast? Here are some easy ideas that are rich in protein and low in simple carbohydrates:

- Natural peanut butter on whole-grain bread, with a dab of all-fruit jam or bananas.
- Eggs; glass of orange juice. To save time, make hard-boiled or deviled eggs the night before.
- Slice of whole-grain bread with a little whipped butter or margarine and a dab of all-fruit jam; low-fat milk.
- Whole-grain cereal with low-fat milk; lean meat from last night’s dinner (pork chop, chicken); orange sections.
- Plain yogurt with fresh fruit.
- Grilled-cheese sandwich made with whole-grain bread and two-percent cheese; glass of orange juice.
- Homemade instant breakfast shake
- Mixed nuts; fruit; glass of low-fat milk.

Don’t be afraid to give a “non-breakfast food” for breakfast. Breakfast food is a cultural concept, not a nutritional one. A leftover bean-and-cheese burrito can make a great breakfast.

2. LUNCH

ADHDers — even adults — are famous for being picky, and this tendency is most often reflected in their lunch menu. If your ADHD child insists on taking the same thing for lunch every day, try these simple ideas to add a little variety to classic lunchbox foods. Expand her palate — and nutrient intake — by pushing the boundaries on what’s familiar!

Instead of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich...

- PB&J on a whole-wheat tortilla
- PB&J on a cinnamon-raisin bagel
- PB&J and sliced apple sandwich
- Peanut butter served as a dip for baby carrots, apple slices, or other fruits and vegetables

Instead of a ham or turkey sandwich...

- Ham or turkey (thinly sliced) wrapped around a breadstick or pretzel stick
- Ham or turkey (thinly sliced) wrapped around cantaloupe slices
- Ham or turkey cubes in a pasta salad
- Ham or turkey cubes in potato salad

Instead of a cheese sandwich...

- Cheese cubes in a pasta salad
- Cheese and sun-dried tomatoes served on plain bread
- Cheese spread on a whole-wheat tortilla
- String-cheese sticks with pita chips
Instead of chicken nuggets...

- Chicken stuffed into mini pita pockets
- Chicken cut up into pasta or potato salad
- Chicken and cheese spread sandwiches
- Chicken in a “taco salad” with baked tortilla chips, salsa, and cheese cubes

3. DINNER

Between soccer practice, gymnastics, and long commutes, parents always feel we’re rushing to get food on the table before starving kids melt down. Add ADHD to the mix (in either parent or child), and mealtime can be a nightmare. That’s why for dinner, we’ve compiled a quick list of 5 great cookbooks, plus quick and easy recipes — most ready in 30 minutes or less — loaded with the protein and fiber to keep ADHD minds and bodies going strong.

### ADHD-FRIENDLY COOKBOOKS

**The Kid-Friendly ADHD & Autism Cookbook, Updated and Revised: The Ultimate Guide to the Gluten-Free, Casein-Free Diet**
by Pamela Compart, M.D. and Dana Laake, R.D.H., M.S., L.D.N.
(Fair Winds Press) 2009

**The Autism and ADHD Diet: A Step-by-Step Guide to Hope and Healing by Living Gluten Free and Casein Free (GFCF) and Other Interventions**
by Barrie Silberberg (Sourcebooks) 2009

**The Feingold Cookbook for Hyperactive Children and Others with Problems Associated with Food Additives and Salicylates**
by Ben Feingold (Random House) 1979

**Special Diets for Special Kids, Volumes 1 and 2 Combined: Over 200 REVISED and NEW gluten-free casein-free recipes, plus research on the positive ... ADHD, allergies, celiac disease, and more!**
by Lisa Lewis, Ph.D. (Future Horizons) 2011

**Special Diet Solutions: Healthy Cooking Without Wheat, Gluten, Dairy, Eggs, Yeast, or Refined Sugar**
by Carol Fenster, Ph.D. (Savory Palate) 1997
ADHD-Friendly Dinner Ideas

CHICKEN PARMESAN PIZZA
For the full recipe, visit Southern Living magazine

For this protein-packed main dish, simply add chicken strips, pizza sauce, cheese, and basil to frozen garlic bread or pre-made pizza dough. Your kids will love it, and it can easily be adapted to whatever ingredients you have on hand. We like to adapt this recipe by throwing extra veggies on top and using chicken sausage. Either way, it’ll still be ready in less than 30 minutes.

TWO-BEAN BURRITO
Recipe contributed by Jill Weisenberger, MS, RDN, CDE

In a casserole dish sprayed with nonstick cooking spray, mix 1 can each of: refried beans, diced tomatoes (drained), black beans (drained), sliced black olives and reduced-fat cheddar cheese. Heat at 350 degrees for 30 minutes, then serve with whole-wheat tortillas, plain Greek yogurt, rice, and your favorite jarred salsa.

CHICKEN AND RICE (THE EASY WAY!)
Get the full recipe from Mark Bittman and the New York Times

This “minimalist” recipe for chicken and rice from The New York Times’ famous foodie Mark Bittman is easy enough for even the most inexperienced chef. Add onions, a few spices, and lemon wedges for garnish, and you have a full meal in just half an hour!

BAKED TILAPIA WITH CRUMB CRUST
Get the full recipe from Daisy Cottage Cheese

The tilapia in this recipe will give you a boost of Omega-3 fatty acids, and the cottage cheese crust provides protein and flavor that everyone will love.

SALMON SALAD
Contributed by Jill Weisenberger, MS, RDN, CDE

Drain a can of salmon (again, omega-3 fatty acids!) and toss with thawed broccoli florets from your freezer. Add any vegetables you have on hand — chopped zucchini, diced red onion, or bell pepper — then add one can of chickpeas or white beans (drained and rinsed). Dress with oil and vinegar or your favorite Italian salad dressing. Round out the meal with pita bread or crackers and some fresh fruit.
QUICK AND EASY PORK FRIED RICE

*The full recipe is available at Dinner: A Love Story*

If you have leftover rice on hand, use it to whip up this quick and delicious one-skillet meal with a medley of fresh or frozen veggies. It also works with chicken, beef, tofu, or purely vegetables!

BARBECUE SHRIMP

*Find the full recipe in Southern Living magazine*

Five ingredients and 30 minutes of baking is all you need to prepare this delicious New Orleans style shrimp that the whole family will love. For an easy side dish, try steaming some broccoli and covering it with the rich buttery sauce.

SLOW COOKER BEEF BOURGUIGNON

*Recipe courtesy of Crockpot365*

Don't be put off by the fancy name — this recipe is really just a classic roast, made in a slow cooker. Throw in all the ingredients in the morning and dinner will be ready by the time you get home!

SUMMER CORN AND TOMATO PASTA

*Find the full recipe in Rachael Ray magazine*

Take advantage of summer vegetables while you can, with this simple and delicious pasta that kids will love. It's perfect as is, or you can customize it with your favorite sauce or any meat you have on hand.

SLOPPY JOE SLIDERS

*Find this recipe in Cooking Light*

This cafeteria staple gets a twist in the form of mini sliders. Kids will delight in the tiny sandwiches, and parents will enjoy the fact that they can have dinner on the table in less than 20 minutes, even with a side dish of steamed broccoli or green beans.
4. SNACKS

Snacking regularly throughout the day can help keep your blood sugar on an even level, improving your ability to focus. Instead of reaching for oily potato chips, however, check out these healthier options to keep your stomach full and your ADHD brain running smoothly.

ENERGY BARS

Fruit or protein bars can be a good choice for a quick, filling snack — just make sure your bars aren’t loaded with sugar or preservatives! Bar-makers whose products pass our test are LaraBar, Think Products, and Raw Revolution. Each makes organic raw-food bars that combine protein and flavor. None uses hydrogenated oils, food coloring, or artificial preservatives. All are free of gluten, as well as wheat, corn, and soy — foods that, studies suggest, can cause some ADHD children to lose focus and become more hyperactive.

If you’re looking for a flavorful high-protein bar — many of them taste like sawdust covered in chocolate — Think Products’ thinkThin contains 20 grams of protein, and comes in chocolate mudslide, chunky peanut butter, and brownie crunch flavors. The full line of LaraBars contains five grams of protein and three grams of fiber.

Clif Kid Organic Zbars are free of preservatives, artificial flavors, and dyes. The company uses fig paste and brown rice and tapioca syrups as sweeteners. Each bar contains three grams of fiber and protein, and they come in flavors kids love.

CRACKERS AND PRETZELS

For snacks that — sort of — have the taste appeal of potato chips, Mary’s Gone Crackers offers crunchy, flavorful possibilities. The organic baked crackers, with the company’s name, and its Sticks & Twigs are gluten-free. They are made from brown rice, quinoa, flax, and sesame seeds, not rice or corn. Several products contain more than 550 mg. of omega-3s per serving.

Kracker Enterprises makes its savory, and slightly sweet, flatbreads and crackers from organic whole grains, such as wheat and spelt, and seeds. They are good sources of fiber, protein, omega 3s, vitamins, and iron. Flavors include Pumpkin Cheddar and Sunflower Cheddar. If you or your child finds the cracker too plain, spread peanut butter or hummus on it.

Newman’s Own Organic makes a line of pretzels for people with special dietary needs. Newman’s high-protein pretzel has five grams of protein per serving.

“Snacking regularly throughout the day can help keep your blood sugar on an even level, improving your ability to focus.”
FRUIT SMOOTHIES
Fruit-based smoothies are winners for nutrition and taste. *Odwalla* and *Naked Juice* make organic, nondairy smoothies that are as rich as milkshakes and come in kid-friendly flavors to keep picky eaters happy.

*Odwalla’s Soy Smart line combines six grams of soy protein and 32 mg. of omega-3s with vanilla and chocolate flavors. Naked Juice’s Superfood smoothies are high in vitamins (especially B vitamins, which may increase the brain’s levels of dopamine) and antioxidants.*

**Snack Suggestions from ADDitude Readers**
We asked ADHD families what snacks are a hit at their house. Here’s what they said!

“Soft pretzels and lemonade, and all types of melons and berries.”
— Marie, Portsmouth, Rhode Island

“I make healthy pizza: Boboli pizza crust (thin), Hunts Garlic, Oregano, and Basil sauce, soy or cow’s-milk mozzarella. Assemble and bake at 350 degrees for eight minutes.”
— Jean, Allen, Texas

“Trail mix, with fruits and nuts, but no chocolate bits. The dried fruits give it a sweet taste.”
— Erin, Greeley, Colorado

“Spread peanut butter on half of a slice of turkey bologna. Fold the slice in half. My daughter calls it a ‘bologna taco’!”
— Lisa, Robbinsdale, Minnesota

“We have great luck with *PowerBars*. They are high in protein and taste good.”
— Karyn, Macomb, Michigan

“*Yoplait Original Yogurt* — strawberry and French vanilla don’t have artificial colors.”
— Nancy, Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

“Yogurt in a tube and string cheese, while expensive, can be eaten out of the package without utensils.”
— Lori, British Columbia, Canada
“ZonePerfect Bars — they’re high in protein and can be eaten on the run.”
—Susan, Centerbrook, Connecticut

“My ADHD boys are sensitive to the taste of older bread. Fresh bread makes sandwiches more appealing — and they’ll usually eat them.”
—Helen, Carmichael, California

“My 11-year-old son loves crunchy dill pickles wrapped in a slice of turkey or ham.”
—Elizabeth, Ontario, Canada

“Fluffernutters — they don’t make my son hyperactive and they fatten him up a little.”
—Rebecca, Fredericksburg, Virginia

5. DESSERT
Dessert doesn’t have to be the enemy! You can still treat yourself or your child to something sweet — in moderation, of course.

Try these easy dessert suggestions:

HOMEMADE APPLESAUCE
Peel and cut several apples into small chunks. Place in a saucepan with 1/4 cup of water. Sprinkle with just a little sugar, then cover and cook over low heat, stirring often, until softened. Spice with cinnamon and raisins.

Nutritional bonus: Homemade applesauce provides at least 10 percent of your daily requirement of vitamin C. Not as much as orange juice, certainly, but four times as much as store-bought applesauce (unless you buy a brand that’s fortified with vitamin C). For extra protein and calcium, serve with lemon-flavored yogurt.

CARROT CAKE
Classic carrot cake recipes call for up to a pound of grated carrots. For a cake that’s tasty and nutritious, work from a recipe that uses a lot of carrots, and substitute “light” olive or canola oil for butter.

Nutritional bonus: One slice of carrot cake can provide half of your daily requirement of vitamin A.

TIP: To cut fat and boost protein, substitute a dollop of low-fat vanilla or lemon yogurt for the traditional cream cheese frosting.
BELGIAN WAFFLE
Top a four-inch, whole-grain waffle with 1/2 cup of frozen vanilla yogurt and 1/2 cup of sliced strawberries (or a combination of berries and other fruit).

Nutritional bonus: This dessert is a nutritional windfall. It provides up to 20 percent of your daily requirement of protein and calcium, more than 75 percent of vitamin C, a range of B vitamins, and a couple of grams of fiber to boot.

FROZEN BANANAS
Peel firm, ripe bananas, wrap in waxed paper and then in plastic wrap. Freeze. Remove from freezer five minutes before serving.

Nutritional bonus: Frozen bananas have the consistency of ice cream. What’s more, bananas are a great source of minerals, dietary fiber, and vitamins B and C.

TIP: For even more protein and vitamin C, puree ripe banana, strawberries, and low-fat vanilla yogurt in a blender. Freeze, and serve in scoops, like ice cream.

PUDDING PARFAIT
Alternate layers of vanilla pudding and sliced strawberries and bananas in a tall glass. Drizzle with chocolate syrup.

Nutritional bonus: One half-cup of strawberries provides more than half of your daily requirement of vitamin C. For extra protein, add layers of chopped nuts. For extra calcium, combine equal parts vanilla pudding and plain yogurt arranged in parfait layers.

FROZEN CHOCOLATE PUDDING
Make pudding with low-fat milk and freeze in individual paper cups.

Nutritional bonus: A half cup of chocolate pudding provides up to 20 percent of your daily requirement of calcium and up to 10 percent of your protein requirement.

TIP: For even more protein, stir creamy peanut butter into the milk before adding the pudding mix.
Dealing With A Picky Eater

Most children initially turn up their noses at new, healthy foods — and children with ADHD are no exception. In fact, sensory issues or ODD can make kids with ADHD even pickier than average. If your child is taking medication on top of a finicky palate, it can suppress her appetite even further — making it tough for her to get the nutrients she needs.

If you’re done with feeding your child chicken nuggets for every meal, try these 9 tips to keep your child well fed, happy, and healthy — without fights.

1. Make Food Fun

For younger children especially, presentation can really affect whether a food gets eaten. Cut food into funny shapes using cookie cutters, or take a few seconds to make a fruit happy face on top of his pancakes. Serve veggies with an assortment of tasty dips, so your child can take his pick and feel in control of the meal. Check out some fun and easy food ideas for kids [here](#).

2. Respect Your Child’s Appetite—Up to a Point

If your child isn’t hungry at dinnertime but is ravenous at 8 p.m., don’t pick a fight. Have healthy, filling food available when she wants it — even if it doesn’t fit into your family’s schedule.

Sandy Newmark agrees with this up to a point. He paraphrases Ellyn Satter, M.S., RDN, a feeding therapist: The job of a parent is to offer her child the food you want him to eat. His job is to decide whether to eat it or not. If you don’t want your child to eat some food—white bread, for example—then do not offer it. If he refuses what you offer, that is his choice. No child has been hurt by missing a meal. He will be hungrier for the next one.

This does not mean that, when changing a child’s breakfast from Cocoa Puffs or waffles and syrup to something healthier, you cannot offer him a choice. Perhaps you can offer him yogurt and fruit or whole-grain toast with almond butter. However, if your child refuses both, he will not eat until the next meal.
3. Hide Nutrition Anywhere You Can

Some ADHD kids are so picky, they won't even look at anything green. Parents have to be creative, and sneak veggies into the foods they will eat. If your child loves fruit, whip up a healthy smoothie with berries and yogurt. When your child isn't looking, throw some spinach into the blender — she won't even know it's there! Try this recipe to get you started:

**INGREDIENTS**
- 2 cups (8 ounces) frozen or fresh red berries, raspberries, strawberries, or a mix
- 3 cups (3 ounces) spinach (packed)
- 1 cup yogurt, kefir, or a non-dairy alternative like almond milk
- 1 large banana, fresh or frozen

**PREPARATION**
Put the berries and spinach in the blender first, and add the yogurt and banana. Process, scraping down as needed. Blend until smooth and serve.

**TIPS & NOTES**
If the smoothie is too thick to blend, add milk or a non-dairy alternative as needed to blend.

*Recipe by Robin Asbell for Stronger Together*

“Some ADHD kids are so picky, they won’t even look at anything green.”

4. Cut Down on Distractions

Young children — especially those with ADHD — can get easily distracted during mealtimes. Try turning off the TV and other devices while your family eats. This stops your child from being overstimulated, and lets him focus more on cleaning his plate.

5. Set a Good Example

Children often mimic their parents — especially when it comes to eating habits. If you only eat fast food but encourage him to eat his vegetables, he’ll smell something fishy — and may be more likely to refuse “healthy” foods. Practice what you preach, and eat the way you’d like your child to eat. He’ll be more likely to follow suit.
6. Get Them Involved
Kids are more interested in food when they can take part in it. Bring your child along with you to the grocery store or farmers market, and have him pick out whatever fruits and vegetables he wants. Then, work together to come up with a recipe and cook a meal for the family. Sure, he may make a bit of mess, but he’ll be excited to serve — and eat — the meal he helped make.

7. Give a Multivitamin
If you’re still worried your child isn’t getting the nutrition he needs, try adding a multivitamin to her daily diet. Kids’ vitamins come in chewable, gummy, and even milkshake varieties — with so many options, you’re bound to find one your child likes. Just make sure that the vitamin doesn’t contain artificial flavors or colors.

8. Keep Trying
It can take children 10 tries before they’ll start to like a new food. So keep offering them healthy alternatives and encourage them to take at least one bite each time. If they hate it, don’t force them to eat anymore — but serve it again a few weeks later, and ask that they try it again. You may find that the third time is the charm — or the fourth, or the ninth.

9. Sensory Processing Disorder
If your child has sensory processing issues, she may be having difficulty with more than just the taste of the food. If you’ve tried everything and feel like you’re at the end of your rope, it may be time to look into Sensory Processing Disorder. Ask your pediatrician about occupational therapists or nutritionists who may be able to help your child overcome food issues.
FOR FURTHER READING

The Omnivore’s Dilemma by Michael Pollan: An in-depth — and highly readable — look into where our food comes from. Pollan, a renowned food journalist, explores the modern food chain, from fast food to homegrown vegetables.

Please Don’t Label My Child by Scott Shannon: This insightful book tackles our society’s need to label children with difficulties — often as a justification for prescribing medications. Dr. Shannon instead advocates a more nuanced and holistic approach, treating the child as more than a “disorder.”

The Omega-3 Connection by Andrew Stoll: This book is almost 15 years old, but the strong case it makes regarding the benefits of omega-3 supplements has stood the test of time.

The Misunderstood Child by Larry Silver: Every parent of a child with learning disabilities has heard of this book. Now in its fourth edition, it outlines the best way to become a supportive advocate for your child.

Eating Well for Optimum Health by Andrew Weil: Dr. Weil, a well-respected doctor and holistic health expert, outlines simply and clearly what you need to know to create a healthy diet for yourself and your family.

How to Get your Kids to Eat: But Not Too Much by Ellyn Satter: Parents’ worries about their picky eaters can be eased a bit after reading this classic text on overcoming food issues in children.

The Sneaky Chef by Missy Chance Lapine: Having trouble getting your kids to eat their veggies? The Sneaky Chef makes it easy, with fun, straightforward tips for feeding your child healthy foods he’ll love.

Is This Your Child? by Doris Rapp: Though this book is over 20 years old, it still rings true on the link between food sensitivities and ADHD. If you’re curious about how food may affect your child’s behavior, this book is a great start.

The Highly Sensitive Child by Elaine Aron: ADHD children are sensitive to more than just food. If your child struggles to deal with touch, sound, or smells, this book can offer support and parenting strategies.

How Nutrition Deficit Disorder Affects Your Child’s Learning, Behavior, and Health, and What You Can Do About It — Without Drugs by William Sears: For parents who want to avoid medication as much as possible, this book is a down-to-earth guide on how natural treatments — particularly diet — can benefit your child’s mental health.
FOOTNOTES


**ADDitude Special Reports**
Available Now
www.adhdreports.com

**Mindfulness and Other Natural Treatments**
The best non-medical treatments for ADHD, including exercise, green time, and mindful meditation.

Learn how mindfulness works on ADHD brains, and how to begin practicing it today. Plus, research the benefits of other alternative treatments like yoga and deep breathing exercises – including some designed especially for kids – as well as the science behind each natural therapy.

>> Learn More About This Special Report: [http://additu.de/mindfulness](http://additu.de/mindfulness)

**ADHD 101**
A complete overview of ADHD, outlining every step from diagnosis to treatment—all the way to living successfully with attention deficit.

From the moment you suspect ADHD in yourself or your child, you have hundreds of questions. Which doctor can evaluate symptoms? What medication side effects should you be prepared for? Can diet help? This comprehensive eBook has over 100 pages of expert advice, personal stories, and more to help you become and ADHD expert.

>> Learn more about this special report: [http://additu.de/adhd-101](http://additu.de/adhd-101)

**9 Conditions Often Diagnosed with ADHD**
Depression. Bipolar Disorder. Anxiety. OCD. And five more conditions that often show up alongside attention deficit.

About 80 percent of individuals with ADHD are diagnosed with at least one other psychiatric condition at some time in their lives. This in-depth special report looks at the nine most common, outlining symptoms, treatment strategies, and differentiating features of each. Plus, strategies for living well with any mental health condition.

>> Learn more about this special report: [http://additu.de/related](http://additu.de/related)

**FREE ADDitude Downloadable Booklets**

**4 Parent-Child Therapies for Better Behavior**
Many families living with ADHD use behavior therapy and family training programs to break the cycle of bad behavior and defiance.

**50 Smart Discipline Tips for Children with ADHD**
The best techniques from parenting experts for dealing with dishonesty, getting your child to take you seriously, and much more!

**A Routine That Works for Kids with ADHD**
Customize this hour-by-hour routine for your child — and make your day less stressful.

**13 Parenting Strategies for Kids with ADHD**
What does it take to be a great parent to a child with ADHD? Here’s what works, and why.

**When You Have ADHD, Too**
18 tips for parents with ADHD—advice on balancing career, housework, and childcare when you share a diagnosis.

**Homework Help for Children with ADHD**
Addressing homework problems is critical – here’s how to do it.

**You Know Your Child Has ADHD When...**
Parents on the funny side to living with ADHD symptoms

Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at: [http://additu.de/freedownloads](http://additu.de/freedownloads)
FREE ADHD Webinar Replays from ADDitude:

Food Fixes for Better Attention, Focus, and Cognition

Eat your way to improved health and focus. Learn how your meal choices can impact ADHD symptoms—for better or worse. In this audio and slide presentation, hosted by Tana Amen, BSN, RN, find out which foods you should eliminate from your family’s diet, and how to spice up your weekly menu by incorporating healthy alternatives.

The ADHD Diet

Sandy Newmark, M.D., explains why the right nutrition can make a big difference for children with ADHD. Learn the family meal-planning approach (starting with a good breakfast!) that can help improve symptoms.

What’s Eating Your Child?

We’ve all heard the old saying “You are what you eat,” but how much truth is behind it? According to expert Kelly Dorfman, MS, LND, more than you might think! In this expert webinar, she explains the link between nutrition and ADHD symptoms in children.

Thrive with ADHD

Let Dr. Ned Hallowell inspire you to switch from trying to “fix” your child or yourself to raising a champion. He discusses an optimized treatment plan that includes medical and natural interventions as well as lifestyle changes.

Positive Parenting

Improving behavior in elementary-aged children through consistency, external motivators, and selective negative consequences, from Mary Rooney, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist at the ADHD and Disruptive Behavior Disorders Center. Learn the importance of consistency for kids!

FREE ADHD Newsletters from ADDitude

Sign up to receive critical news and information about ADHD diagnosis and treatment, success at school, adult ADHD, and parenting strategies: [http://additu.de/email](http://additu.de/email)

- Adult ADHD and LD (weekly)
  Expert advice on managing your household, time, money, career, and relationships

- Parenting ADHD and LD Children (weekly)
  Strategies and support for parents on behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, and making friends.

- ADHD and LD at School (bimonthly; weekly from August through October)
  How to get classroom accommodations, finish homework, work with teachers, find the right schools, and much more.

- Treating ADHD (weekly)
  Treatment options for attention deficit including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies.