

## ADHD, NUTRITION, AND WELLNESS

A common side effect of stimulant/ADHD medication is weight loss, or a child not eating enough. To help your child continue to grow appropriately, try the following tips:

- Encourage calorie-dense foods at breakfast, such as eggs, toast with peanut butter, full-fat yogurt, or oatmeal.
- Give your child their morning dose of medication after they have eaten breakfast.
- Afternoon doses should be given after lunch. If the medication upsets your child's stomach, be sure to give the medication with food.
- Provide nutritious after-school and bedtime snacks that are high in protein and complex carbohydrates. Examples: Nutrition/protein bars, nuts/seeds, and shakes/smoothies (such as Carnation Breakfast Essentials mixed with whole milk).
- Encourage preferred food before giving other foods.
- Consider shifting dinner to later in the evening when your child's medication has worn off. Alternatively, allow your child to "graze" in the evening on healthy snacks; he or she may be hungriest right before bed.
- Monitor your child's height and weight measurements with your doctor.

### Diet Changes

Food additives include artificial colors, artificial sweeteners and preservatives. There's no solid evidence that food additives cause ADHD; however, the topic of food additives and their possible effects is controversial.



Better research is needed to find out if limiting certain foods or food additives will help reduce hyperactivity and ADHD symptoms.

The Feingold Diet is an elimination diet of certain foods and additives to see if it helps alleviate ADHD symptoms. The diet recommends removing artificial food coloring (petrochemical dyes), artificial flavors and fragrances, certain preservatives, artificial sweeteners, and foods and products containing salicylate. There is insufficient research available to tell us if the Feingold Diet is effective. We do not recommend it at this time. If you have any questions, please speak with your child's doctor or registered dietitian.

The best approach for overall health and nutrition is a diet that limits sugary and processed foods and is rich in fruits, vegetables, grains, and healthy fats such as omega-3 fatty acids and unsaturated fats.

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### Omega-3 Supplementation

There is some clinical evidence that use of omega-3 supplementation may help improve ADHD symptoms in children. In the studies that showed some improvement, it was with high daily doses of EPA and DHA.

The following total daily doses of EPA and DHA are recommended for supplementation:

- EPA should be close to 500 mg or more per day.
- DHA should be close to 200 mg or more per day.
- Choose over-the-counter products that have this amount of EPA and DHA. (You may need to offer omega-3 supplements 2–3 times a day to reach the total daily dosage goals listed above.)

### Get Enough Sleep

Poor sleep causes trouble with focusing and learning, moodiness, and behavior problems.

To help your child sleep better:

- Keep bedtime and wake times the same every day as much as possible.
- Have a bedtime routine of quiet activities (reading, a bath, relaxation exercises).
- Avoid stimulating activities (active play) and screen exposure (TV, phone, or tablet) for 1–2 hours before bedtime. Keep TVs out of the bedroom. Turn off cell phones and keep them outside of the bedroom.
- Keep the bedroom quiet, dark, and cool to promote better sleep.
- Turning down ambient light levels throughout the house 1–2 hours prior to bedtime

promotes the natural release of melatonin in the brain which triggers drowsiness.

- Regular exercise promotes good sleep.

Note: Let your health care provider know if your child is having sleep problems, such as loud snoring, very restless sleeping, or excessive daytime sleepiness.

### Physical Activity

Encourage your child to stay physically active for at least one hour every day. Regular exercise improves learning, ability to focus, memory, and mood.

Exposure to nature benefits our mental state by reducing stress and improving concentration and problem-solving skills. Encourage daily green-time—walking, biking to school, and outings to local parks and green spaces. Spend time together as a family playing outside or engaging in outdoor activities.

For more ideas, visit [getoutdoorscolorado.org](http://getoutdoorscolorado.org).

### Learn More

#### Kaiser Permanente class:

#### Parenting a Child With ADHD

This introductory class is offered quarterly for parents and caregivers of children newly diagnosed or suspected ADHD. Visit [kp.org/classes](http://kp.org/classes) (select Colorado: Denver/Boulder/Mountain, then search “ADHD”).

For more guidance on picky eating, visit [kphealthyme.com/documents/picky-eater-2018](http://kphealthyme.com/documents/picky-eater-2018).