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NUTRITION AND ADHD/BEHAVIOR ISSUES

Tips for using a healthier, natural diet to bring out the best in your child

Better nutrition obviously should be a goal for anyone's family. We should *all* try to eat less junk food, smaller portions, more organic foods, and less fast foods and processed foods for our overall health and for the prevention of such diseases as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

In addition to this, studies have been accumulating over the past few decades related to additives to children's food and behavior issues. The strongest current evidence that certain food additives can adversely affect children's health is a possible link between added food dyes and hyperactivity. Many studies are also looking into other additives and their relation to behavior problems such as attention deficits, aggression, irritability, tics, sensory integration problems, and anger outbursts. In Britain, after a recent report in the *Lancet* medical journal showed a link between food dyes and hyperactivity, the government is working with manufacturers to ban these dyes in their products. Take a look at all the foods and products your child is potentially exposed to every day, from toothpaste to breakfast cereal to lunchmeats to boxed meal kits to some M&Ms or fruit snacks for a treat, and notice how many of them include the petroleum-based additives listed below:

- **Artificial food dyes:** may be listed as "food coloring", "coloring", "red dye #40", "Yellow #5", etc.
- **Artificial flavors:** may be listed as "flavoring", "artificial flavoring", "or butter flavoring". "Vanillin" (sometimes listed as "vanilla flavoring") is very common artificial flavoring that causes problems for many people. "Natural flavoring" does *not* always mean "all-natural flavoring" - it depends on the brand. Look for real "vanilla" instead.
- **Artificial preservatives:** Most common behavior culprits are BHT, BHA, and TBHQ. These are in many foods and *are not required to be listed* on the packaging (i.e. if they are used as pan sprays, etc). When they are, they are commonly listed like "BHT added for freshness". Common places to find (and avoid) these are: cereal/crackers/bread packaging, pepperoni and processed meats, commercial frying oils (this means restaurant and fast food chicken nuggets and French fries!), other oils listed in foods or cooking oils, etc.

This diet may take some getting used to at first, but doesn't have to be restrictive. Be positive! Approach it with your children as "Look what we can eat!" or "This food has some yucky stuff in it that's not good for us, so we'll eat this good stuff instead". Many times following this diet requires

only a simple change of brand or type, not eliminating something completely. Some examples of common kid favorites that typically have no “artificial”: Maranatha, “Simply” Jif, or Peter Pan peanut butter; Dannon all natural yogurts; Tom’s or Natural Dentist Kids’ toothpaste; Annie’s Mac & Cheese, Back to Nature crackers; Aunt Jemima “Original” pancakes; Horizon organic milk/yogurts; “EnviroKidz”, “Mom’s Brand”, “Annie’s” or “Barbara’s” cereals of all types; Kirkland Brand (Costco) Vanilla ice cream; Hillshire Farms Deli Select Sandwich meats, fresh or frozen chicken breasts without “broth” listed; many commercial cheese pizzas; all the “Try This” suggestions below. Many of the above are becoming easier to find at your regular grocery store, and Whole Foods and Natural Grocers markets are typically full of good choices.

Here are some examples of some easy substitutions that can be made for common “kid foods”. Not all the substitutions are completely healthy in regards to fats, calories, etc., but are free of the above-mentioned additives and can be a “transition” to overall better choices:

INSTEAD OF THIS:

TRY THIS:

Fast food nuggets & fries (preservatives)..Plain hamburger with fruit/yogurt (if natural) side

Wonder Bread,Nature’s Own (BHT/TBHQ) Rudi’s (Safeway, Sprouts, Whole Foods) or Ezekiel brands, homemade bread

Ritz crackers (BHT in packaging)..... Late July Classic Rich or Sunshine HiHo crackers

Goldfish (preservatives not listed)..... Annie’s Cheddar Bunnies, Back to Nature cheese crackers

Kraft Mac & Cheese..... Annie’s Shells and Cheese

Chocolate Teddy Grahams.....Honey Teddy Grahams, Annie’s Bunnies

Flintstones vitamins (flavors, dyes)..... L’il Critters Gummi Vites, Nordic Naturals

Gogurt (artificial color, BHT in Vit A)... Stonyfield Farms/Horizon portable yogurts

Yoplait yogurt (preserved vit A).....Dannon all-natural yogurts, any flavor

Rold Gold Pretzels (butter flavoring).....Pretzel Crisps Brand, Newman’s Own

DiGiorno’s Pepperoni Pizza..... DiGiorno’s Cheese Pizza with Hormel All Natural or Applegate Farms pepperoni slices added

Duncan Hines Devil’s Food cake mix..... Duncan Hines Dark Chocolate Fudge cake mix

Jell-O.....Knox unflavored gelatin & pure fruit juice

Cheerios (additives in some regions).....Cascadian Farms O’s

Froot Loops (artificial colors)..... 365 brand (Whole Foods) Organic Rainbow Rings

Pepsi (artificial color).....WATER!, original Coca Cola, Hansens’s Natural Sodas

Mountain Dew.....Sprite, 7UP, club soda with 100% juice added

Fat-Free Miracle Whip.....Original Miracle Whip

Oreos..... 365 (Whole Foods brand) sandwich cookies

Hershey chocolate bar or chips.....Ghiradelli chocolate candy bar or chips
M&M's.....Sundrops (available at Whole Foods, Natural Grocers in
bags or bulk)
Artificial food coloring/cake décor.....Natural food coloring and sprinkles (Whole Foods)
Colored Tylenol, Motrin, Benadryl, etc....Dye-Free versions of the same

****Even better!** Look at the above in terms of calories, fat, & “snack” value, and see if offering an unprocessed option would be better for the family as a whole. Wouldn't water be a better choice than soda? Carrots instead of crackers? Oatmeal or unsweetened cereal instead of sweetened cereal? Dried fruit instead of candy?

More Quick Helpful Tips:

Most whole milk, organic milk, and cheeses made from whole milk are free of additives. Many low-fat milks and cheeses use preservatives in their vitamin A palmitate, so if you choose to have low-fat milk, try the following brands: Horizon, 365 brand from Whole Foods, Royal Crest, Market Pantry from Target. Check your yellow cheeses for artificial colors (“annatto” is usually fine). Avoid pre-shredded cheeses as they have many preservatives added to them or the packaging; buy in blocks and shred them yourself. Buy fresh or frozen meats with a minimum of added ingredients; avoid any that list “broth added”. Make larger portion meals and freeze the extra portions to help with future busy nights when fast food is so tempting.

Unfortunately, companies aren't necessarily required to list all ingredients used on or in their food. Examples of foods that may be fine on the label, but have artificial ingredients are: many commercially packaged breads and cereals (BHT/BHA/TBHQ in packaging or pan grease), Goldfish crackers (TBHQ in pan spray), Eggo waffles, most fried foods (except chips), almost all chewing gum (BHT, dyes. If you can't do without, additive-free gum is available at natural grocery stores.) In general, *most* foods labeled “organic” or “all natural” are free of additives, so this is an easy first-glance start. However, some may still contain small amounts of additives, so if your child's behavior seems altered after a specific food, you may want to avoid it.

Each child reacts to this more healthy diet differently, and some are more “chemically sensitive” than others. Many families whose children have significant problems note marked improvements in their child's behavior within a few days; for others, the improvement is more gradual over a few weeks. For a small proportion of children, they actually get a little worse (a “withdrawal” effect from the additives) before they get better. Hang in there! Putting less additives into the body is a worthy goal, and the effects are potentially huge for your child's and your family's quality of life.

Our thanks to the Feingold Association for many of the tips and researched foods listed above. Good dietary support for all of this can be found at www.Feingold.org. Dr. Ben Feingold was a pediatrician with Kaiser who had a deep interest in this topic, and he began research on this topic back in the 1960s and first reported it in 1973. In a recent survey of patients on the Feingold diet (avoiding the dyes, colors, BHT/BHA/TBHQ +/- salicylates – see website for information about

salicylate-containing foods), about 50% reported “great improvement”, about 40% “much improvement”, and only 1% reported “no improvement”. You can join the Feingold Association for a small annual fee (about \$90 for the 1st year), for which you receive a “Foodlist”- an encyclopedia of researched “clean” foods, member support, a fast food and restaurant guide, and newsletters with food updates. Please note that Arvada Pediatrics does not endorse or support some of the Feingold Association’s medical/alternative/anti-vaccine views, but it can be an excellent nutritional resource. They also delve more deeply into other diets if the above is not working (eliminating corn syrup, gluten, casein, etc.) A nutritionist is recommended for any more in-depth elimination diet in order to ensure adequate overall nutritional requirements are met.

In general, if your child has no or only minor behavior concerns, or if you just want to eat healthier, you may only need to make yourself aware of these potentially harmful additives and just limit them when you can. If your child’s behavior issues are significant, you may want to consider investing a few weeks of time, a little extra start-up cost (although you tend to save a lot in fast foods and restaurant foods!), and possibly some pep-talks for your child in pursuing a more serious overhaul of your family’s diet. You may also want to talk to your doctor about other foods or preservatives that have been linked to behavior problems as well. These changes are *much* more effective if the whole family participates; that way, one child is not “singled out” for a “restricted” diet. Worst thing that could happen: your family eats more healthily for a trial period and eats at home, together, more often. Not a bad deal.

SAMPLE WEEK OF FOOD CHOICES WITHOUT ARTIFICIAL ADDITIVES

(These are substitution choices for typical foods in the house. Continue to limit the snacks, chips, ice creams, etc.(!) even though they are listed here)

BREAKFAST CHOICES:

Fresh fruits, Scrambled eggs

Homemade French toast (Rudi’s bread) with 100% maple syrup

Aunt Jemima Original (not buttermilk) pancakes with 100% real maple syrup, real butter

Toast with real butter, honey, or jam (breads like Rudi’s or Ezekiel brands, homemade)

Mom’s Best/Environkidz/Annie’s/Cascadian Farms organic breakfast cereal

Plain oatmeal flavored with spoonful of brown sugar, jam, or fruit juice

Dannon 100% Natural vanilla yogurt, Stonybrook Farm Organic yogurt

Hormel Natural Choice bacon

Glass of whole milk or reduced-fat organic milk, Natural fruit juice

LUNCH CHOICES:

Peanut butter (Jif, Peter Pan, Maranatha) and jelly or honey sandwich on Rudi’s bread

Carrot sticks, celery, pear slices, melon, horizon organic cheese sticks, Babybel “red” cheese

Tuna sandwich (water-packed) with small amount of original Hellman’s mayonnaise

Sandwich with Hormel Natural Choice lunch meat (turkey, roast beef, ham)

Hillshire Farm Beef summer sausage

“Bernie-O’s” by Annie’s (substitute for Spaghetti-O’s; find at Whole Foods, Target)

“Yummy” Brand DinoNuggets/Chicken Nuggets (Costco, Safeway, Target, King Soopers)

Applegate Farms or Ian’s Organic Chicken Nuggets

DINNER CHOICES:

Roast chicken (without added broth – look for ingredients of only meat, water, +/- salt)

Pot roast, hamburgers, steaks - again, meat without added “broth” or “solution”.

Pork chops sautéed with olive oil, salt, lemon juice

Baked or mashed potatoes with real butter or salsa, pasta with marinara sauce.

Side of frozen veggies like green beans, corn, peas, carrots – season with salt/pepper or butter

Papa John’s, Marco’s, Pizza Hut Cheese pizzas (all the meats have preservatives)

Annie’s Shells and Cheese dinner, many other Annie’s boxed pasta meals

SNACKS:

Carrot sticks, pear slices, banana, melon, apple slices with natural peanut butter

Hot air popcorn (or made with Wesson canola or Mazola corn oil) with butter and salt

Late July Classic Rich crackers with Maranatha peanut butter

Annie’s cheddar bunnies, Back To Nature Brand crackers and cookies

Lays potato chips, Fritos, plain Doritos, Premium Saltines

Pretzels (Newman’s Own, San Francisco Pretzels in large barrel container found at Costco)

Kirkland/Costco Vanilla ice cream, Blue Bell “Natural Vanilla Bean” (not the other vanillas)

(Rev. 9/13)