



Cognitive Diet

Various diets and nutritional approaches have been directed toward neurocognitive functioning, with numerous studies revealing disparate findings. Ultimately, thorough discussion of diet with a certified nutritionist is certainly ideal and recommended for those particularly interested in pursuing this approach. A review of the peer-reviewed literature, however, does yield some general conclusions regarding basic dietary parameters.

First, given the amount of energy the brain devotes to the management of glucose, movement toward a high protein, high complex carbohydrate, and low simple carbohydrate/simple sugar diet is recommended. For example, avoiding simple sugars, such as are found in all forms of “junk Food”, white bread, heavily processed flours, etc., is likely to provide benefit for many children. Likewise, avoiding fruit juices, which tend to have very high levels of sugars, is a benefit. Keep in mind, one small glass of apple juice often has the sugar content of eight apples. If one is to use fruit juices, the diluting it with water at a 50:50 ratio is reasonable. Avoiding NutraSweet and saccharin is strongly recommended given the current state of literature on the direct impact of these chemicals on the brain. Instead, focus on lean meats and low-fat cheeses, fresh vegetables, and then, lastly, whole grain products. Avoiding processed meats is also highly recommended.

Second, there have been numerous studies looking at various dyes, with the literature being somewhat inconsistent in terms of outcomes. Red dyes, however, do seem to be the most problematic and thus, trying to avoid these is strongly advised.

Third, the use of omega-3 fatty acids, particularly from fish sources is recommended. Currently, the literature best supports 2000 mg (1200 mg for those under 7 years of age) of omega-3 per day (including DHA, EPA, and other omega-3 fatty acids). This particular agent is not a “cure” for ADHD or other cognitive syndromes, but rather assists in maintain cerebral health and growth based on the early data. **Omega Swirl from Barlean’s** is an excellent product that is easily absorbed and comes in several flavors. To find a store near you go to <http://www.barleans.com/locator.asp>, or go to the nearest Costco.

It is important to keep in mind that diet rarely provides maximal control of symptoms for all individuals. In fact, the response follows that of the Bell Curve, with some individuals demonstrating very significant benefits, many others demonstrating less but still positive gains, and others with less impressive responses. Ultimately, however, any other treatment is likely to be enhanced as a result of healthy and reasonable dietary changes.



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Finally, it has been noted that many individuals, particularly those with milder symptoms or those who tend to respond very sharply to low doses of medication, may benefit from a relatively simple “home recipe.”

- ✓ **Make a cup of coffee with the flavor that your child will like (realizing that this does add a bit of sugar to the mix, but it will also increase the likelihood of it being consumed on a regular basis).**
- ✓ **Pour the hot coffee into a blender with about six ounces of ice and mix well.**
- ✓ **Add a good quality protein powder. Many good ones are available, and you can ask at your local health food store or your local nutritionist for specific recommendations. However, you want a protein powder that is mostly protein and very little carbohydrates. Add between 15 to 20 grams of protein to the cold coffee in the blender and mix again.**
- ✓ **Drink this on a daily basis — once at breakfast and again around 3:00 pm.**

This protein shake is helpful for many people, particularly for small kids and individuals with relatively mild symptoms or sensitive systems. It works very similarly to a small dose of Ritalin (with 100 mg of caffeine being roughly the same as 5 mg of Ritalin). Do not forget that caffeine can have some side effects and if jitteriness, tachycardia, anxiety, etc., are noted, then you may need to either discontinue or at least drop down on how much caffeine is utilized. Ultimately the protein will help to feed the brain while the caffeine may provide some general benefit in alertness and engagement.