

POSSIBILITIES FOR AUTISM

Feel Better + Live Better

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Healthy Back-to-School Lunch Ideas

I think we all agree that outstanding academic performance and behavior start with a nutritious diet. But, what foods are most effective at helping children think, focus, manage their behavior and mood, and learn efficiently? Following are lunch ideas for foods that have improved focus and concentration for my clients ranging from children with autism to a recent valedictorian at North Carolina State University.

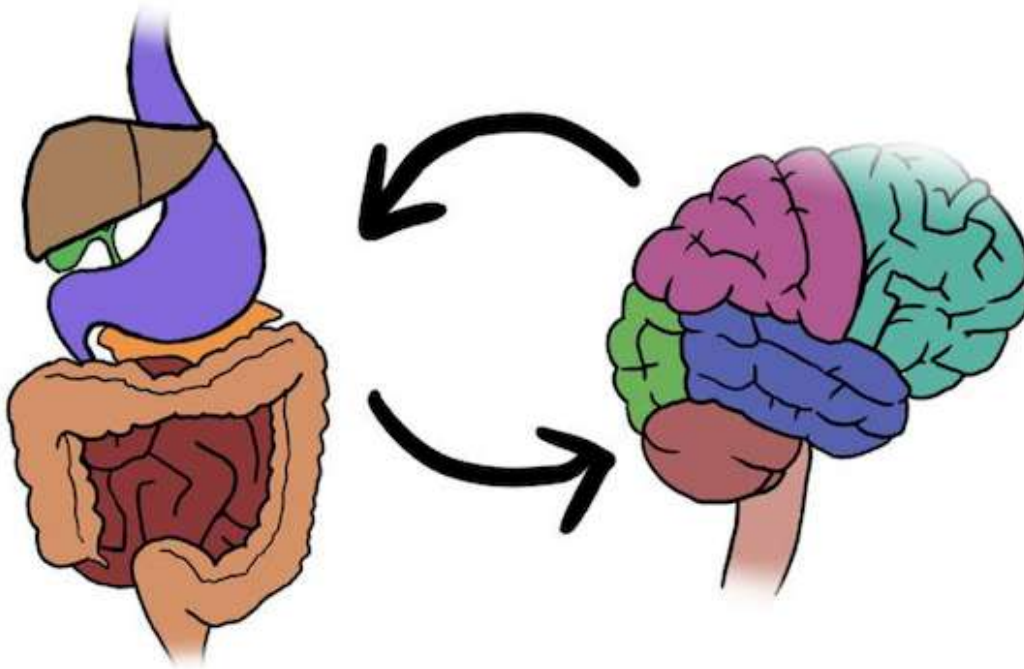


Lunch and The Gut Brain Connection

To understand how food choices can enhance focus and concentration, one must first understand the connection between microbes in the gut and the brain of both

children and adults. Our gut (digestive tract) is populated with an abundance of bacteria. Some of that bacteria is beneficial and some is pathogenic. This bacterial soup is called the gut flora. Too many pathogenic bacteria in our gut impacts our brain. For some of us the impact is mild. We feel brain fog or forgetfulness. For others, the pathogens have a significant impact on quality of life as in ADD, anxiety, speech delays, learning disabilities, autism, etc.

You can improve your children's mental clarity and help them reach higher potential (even if they are already performing at high levels) by starving the pathogenic bacteria. One of my clients, I'll call him Jack, is a great example of what's possible for even the most focused and high achieving students. Jack, a recent valedictorian from NC State, came to me to learn about disease prevention and to lose a few pounds. He had no complaints about his ability to focus. However, when he adopted a way of eating that starves pathogenic bacteria, not only did he lose weight with ease, he was thrilled to gain greater focus, energy, and productivity.



THE GUT-BRAIN CONNECTION

What feeds the pathogenic bacteria?

The foods that feed pathogenic bacteria are all types of sweet and starchy carbohydrates except fruit. The Standard American Diet is full of sweet and starchy foods. It's almost impossible to avoid sweet and starchy foods on the kids' menu at most restaurants ... mac and cheese, pizza, or breaded chicken with a soda and desert. These foods are guaranteed to please a child's palate – and they're cheap. Excess amounts of sweet and starchy foods is one reason so many American children (and adults) have ADD, anxiety, speech delays, learning disabilities, autism, etc. These same foods cause weight gain – another epidemic in American children.

Another challenge with sweet and starchy foods is that they are inflammatory, and general inflammation can cause neurological inflammation – another cause of the “brain fog” issues that can prevent our children from reaching their full potential.

What foods should my child eat to enhance academic achievement?

The good news is that the foods that don't feed the pathogens are also the foods that are most nutrient dense: meat, fish, vegetables, fruit, and nuts. Foods such as bread, pasta, and processed foods have minimal nutritional value. The truth is that these foods have so few naturally occurring vitamins and minerals that they are “enriched” with man-made vitamins.

Here are some ideas for great school lunches that keep the pathogenic bacteria at bay:

Meats and Fish

- o Turkey* roll-ups either plain or with your child's favorite vegetables

- o Chicken salad

Portable Vegetables

- o Carrot sticks

- o Cucumber slices

- o Broccoli

Nuts and Seeds

- o Peanuts

- o Almonds

- o Pecans

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| o Salmon salad | o Red, yellow and green pepper sticks | o Walnuts |
| o Chicken legs | o Salad greens | o Hazelnuts |
| o Grilled chicken breast cut in cubes or fingers | o Cherry tomatoes | o Cashews |
| o Shrimp | o Roasted vegetables | o Pistachios |
| o Deviled eggs | o Sugar snap peas | o Other nuts |
| o Chicken or turkey sausage* | o Green beans | o Sunflower and other seeds |
| | o Cauliflower | |

o Hamburger patty

Nut butters*

o Thermos foods such as soups and chili

*Include dips or dressing if desired. Be sure to buy high-quality dressing with no sugar from the refrigerated section as it usually has no preservatives.

o Peanuts

o Almonds

o Left over meats from dinner, e.g. pork chops

o Sunflower

* Be sure to choose nitrite and nitrate-free lunch meats. Applegate Farms is a well-known brand.

Fruit

*Serve nut butter on celery, apples or even straight on the spoon.

o Berries of all types

o Melon

Sweet Treats

o Cherries

o Trail mix made with nuts, seeds and dried fruit

- o Banana
 - o Peaches
 - o Apples
 - o Grapes
 - o Pineapple
 - o Lara bars
 - o Yawp bars
 - o That's It Bars
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If you're not ready to eliminate all starchy foods, replace foods with wheat (gluten) with gluten-free varieties. Modern wheat is inflammatory for all of us – not just those of us who have a gluten sensitivity. See Dr. William Davis' book, *Wheat Belly*,

for more information on the health consequences of consuming modern wheat.

Watch out for dairy too. The lactose feeds pathogenic bacteria. Many people are lactose intolerant or have a sensitivity to dairy and may not know it. Lactose intolerance and dairy sensitivities cause inflammation which then can lead to neurological inflammation which causes all the conditions discussed in this article.

Whether your child has attention, learning, speech, mood issues or not, he/she can benefit from a diet centered on meat, vegetables, fruits and nuts. Give these foods a try, and you'll be pleased to see your child reach higher levels of achievement.

Resources:

Books:

Gut and Psychology Syndrome by Dr. Natasha Campbell-McBride

Wheat Belly by Dr. William Davis

Articles:

Gut Bacteria Might Guide the Workings of Our Minds — NPR

Can the Bacteria in your Gut Send Messages to Your Brain? – NPR

Inflammation in Neurological and Psychological Diseases — National Institutes of Health

Why Modern Wheat is Considered Frankenwheat — Prevention Magazine

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