

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Children With Starving Brains **BY ILANA GERSCHLOWITZ**



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Every parent wants their child to have the food they love. No one feels like a fight when it comes to meal times. We tend to serve foods which suit each child's individual tastebuds. Pesach is a good time to reflect on your food menu and consider making changes, as nutrition really matters. There are many healthy, good tasting snacks available. Once a satisfactory replacement food is identified, you will be able to eliminate 'junk food' from the diet.

Carefully deciding on the contents of a school lunch box is important and can affect your child's behaviour, cognitive ability, anxiety, focus, and attention. A protein shake is a good option to help a child sustain attention and can provide the necessary fuel to get through a long school day. Avoiding gluten and casein (dairy) is at the heart of a treatment protocol for children with ADHD, behavioural challenges, autism, or sensory issues. In a nutshell, certain enzymes are required to break down gluten and casein. If those enzymes don't function well, or are not present at a sufficient level, these foods can contribute to neurological dysfunction. Twenty years ago, when I searched for gluten-free alternatives, we didn't have the many options and variety available today.

Many parents have witnessed dramatic improvements when changing their child's

diet. Dr Ben Feingold came along as a white knight when he published '*Why Your Child Is Hyperactive*'. The late Dr Feingold was a paediatric allergist who proved that childhood hyperactivity was caused by food dyes, artificial flavourings, and certain preservatives. He prescribed a diet that eliminated these items, as well as food containing the natural chemical known as salicylates. Good old fashioned chicken soup for breakfast can be a much healthier option than processed cereal in a box.

Emerging evidence has linked the gut microbiome to speech and language delays. Soda, refined sugar, processed grains, artificial colours, and sweeteners wreak havoc on the immune system. These foods cause systemic inflammation throughout the body and can affect the brain as well. Vitamin D can improve symptoms of autism. Vitamin E and folic acid can improve speech apraxia in children. Diets lacking vitamin B1 (thiamine) can result in cognitive and motor deficits, including, dyslexia, and learning disabilities. There is mounting evidence that Omega-3 fatty acids can help lessen the symptoms of ADHD and sensory issues. Many studies link nutritional deficiencies to ADHD, autism, and language disorders. Giving your child a good quality multi-vitamin is

essential to correct nutritional deficiencies and a good place to start.

Harvard researcher and clinician Dr Martha Herbert moves beyond conventional thinking when analysing autism. She is the author of *The Autism Revolution – The Body Wants To Get Better*. She teaches us that the brain is not malformed. It is irritated and diet is a big consideration when considering treatment options. Proper food and nutrition calm the brain chaos and provide the ingredients needed for cells to function. Yeast overgrowth in the gut also requires investigation, as it can cause sleep disturbances, sensory issues, hyperactivity, and picky-eating. Many parents of children with autism have experienced marked improvements when following the GAPS diet.

The key is to understand that your child's condition doesn't exist in isolation and doesn't start and end in the brain. When looking at your child's challenges as a whole body disorder it then becomes easier for you and their doctor to address underlying issues. Nutrition is the link between our genes and environment and their influence on health. When we change diet, we can relieve the body from burden and restore function. (*Nourishing Hope – Why Diet Matters for children with ADHD and Autism* by Julie Mathews).

The contents of this article was not intended as medical advice. Please consult your doctor before deciding on treatment options.

