



Commonly Asked Questions About ADHD and Nutrition

ADHD is a chronic disorder that affects an estimated 5 to 9% of children. Read on to find answers to commonly asked questions about ADHD and nutrition.

What is ADHD?

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a complex disorder that is thought to be caused by a combination of genetics and environmental factors. The main symptoms of ADHD include:

- Difficulty paying attention
- Difficulty sitting still
- Difficulty focusing on tasks
- Acting without thinking

All children show some of these symptoms at times but for children with ADHD, the symptoms are on-going.

My child has ADHD. Will a gluten-free diet help manage this condition?

There is not enough research to show that a gluten-free diet helps reduce symptoms of ADHD. If your child has celiac disease, they need to follow a gluten-free diet which avoids all wheat, rye, and barley products and other foods containing gluten.

Children who have undiagnosed celiac disease may suffer from the same symptoms as children with ADHD. This is why some people believe that children who have ADHD should not eat products with gluten.

If you think your child's diet is causing ADHD symptoms or you are concerned your child may have celiac disease, talk to your healthcare provider. [Read more about celiac disease.](#)

When planning meals and snacks for your child, follow the advice in [Canada's Food Guide.](#)



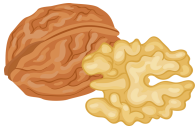
Do omega-3 supplements help children with ADHD?

There is not enough proof to support the use of omega-3 fatty acid supplements in ADHD. However, some children with ADHD may have low blood-levels of omega-3 and would benefit from getting more from their diet.

Food sources of omega-3 include:



Fatty fish like salmon, sardines, herring and mackerel



Nuts and seeds like walnuts and ground flaxseed



Omega-3 enriched eggs, yogurt, milk and other enriched foods



Edamame, tofu and soy products



Canola and flaxseed oil

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Does eating too much sugar make ADHD symptoms worse?

Research has not shown a link between sugar and ADHD symptoms. However, added sugars should still be limited as part of a nutritious diet. To reduce added sugar, try:

- Comparing food labels at the grocery store and choosing foods with less sugar.
- Making your own baked goods at home and reducing how much sugar you use.
- Eating less processed and packed foods. Instead, stock your kitchen with cut-up veggies and fruit, nuts and seeds, whole grain crackers and cereal, plain milk, yogurt or plant-based beverages for a quick and healthy snack.

Are food additives and preservatives making children hyperactive?

Research is not clear whether food additives and preservatives make ADHD symptoms worse. A food additive is a chemical added to food to help make the food look better, increase its shelf life, improve its texture or to add colour and taste. Food additives are regulated by Health Canada. If you think they may be affecting your child's behaviour, you can keep a food journal to keep track of what your child eats and any reactions they have. Food additives do not need to be avoided if your child does not react to them. Consult with your [dietitian](#) and healthcare provider if you plan to eliminate foods from your child's diet so they can help you ensure your child isn't missing any key nutrients for growth and development.

How can a dietitian help?

A dietitian is a valuable member of your child's healthcare team. They will:

- Work with you to plan a balanced, nutritious diet that will help your child thrive and grow.
- Make sure your child is getting enough essential nutrients like omega-3, iron and zinc.
- If your child has celiac disease, a dietitian can help you learn about and plan a gluten-free diet.
- Help you with reading labels and meal planning.
- Review food records you may keep for your child and help you identify any food sensitivities.