



Improving Your Child's Concentration

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Summary

- Factors contributing to lack of concentration
 - Internal causes
 - External causes
- The role of healthy eating in improving focus and concentration
- Other factors which may aid concentration
 - Nutritional supplements
 - Herbal remedies
 - Exercise

Factors contributing to lack of concentration

Internal Causes

Physical Factors:

- Exhaustion
- Irregular sleep patterns
- Unbalanced diet and hunger
- Lack of exercise
- Stress
- Medications
- Eyesight problems

Psychological Factors:

- Boredom
- Daydreaming
- Overload
- Fear
- Guilt
- Avoidance
- Intimidation
- Lack of motivation

External Causes

Environmental Factors:

- Noise
- Television
- Telephone, internet, and email
- Poor lighting
- Temperature
- Visual stimulation
- Pollutants
- Activity

Personal Factors:

- Lack of parental supervision
- Lack of discipline
- Lack of routine and structure
- Learning in a second language

What does food have to do with concentration?

- What we feed our children DIRECTLY impacts their brain function.

The 'S' Word - SUGAR

- Sugar in the form of glucose is your brain's super fuel, it cannot function without it.
- But your child needs the RIGHT TYPES and RIGHT AMOUNT of sugar at the RIGHT TIME.
- Too much 'fast absorbing' sugar means a blood sugar high and hyperactivity, thus lack of concentration.
- Too much sugar and your child may be hyperactive and find it hard to concentrate.
- Too little and they may feel tired, irritable and find it hard to concentrate.

Foods to Eat MORE Of

Good fats - omega 3

Wholegrains

Protein

Antioxidant & nutrient rich foods

Foods to eat more of: GOOD FATS

- Approximately 2/3 of the brain consists of fat.
- The right balance of fatty acids may aid concentration; an imbalance may contribute towards hyperactivity.
- Good sources of omega 3 fats include: oily fish (salmon, tuna, mackerel, sardines, anchovies) nuts, seeds, eggs, wheatgerm and oils such as flax, hemp and olive oil.
- Top tip: Grind nuts and seeds in a small coffee grinder and sprinkle on yoghurt, breakfast cereal and soups. A small amount of oil can also be stirred into mashed potato, soups, stews and yoghurt. Aim to give your child oily fish 2-3x per week.

Foods to eat more of: WHOLEGRAINS& PROTEIN

Wholegrains & Protein help to regulate blood sugar levels to regulate your child's energy and concentration levels.

WHOLEGRAINS

- Foods made from the entire seed grain; contain slow releasing sugar.
- Examples of whole grains include: whole wheat, brown rice, wild rice, buckwheat, bulgur, millet, quinoa, rolled oats, barley, whole oats, whole rye.
- Top tip: mix half wholegrain with half white grains until your child is used to the texture and flavour, and then replace entirely.

PROTEIN

- Balanced protein intake = Balanced energy and concentration levels
- Protein-rich foods include lean beef, pork, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, nuts, cheese, lentils, beans, soy and low fat dairy products.
- Top tip: Hide some protein pulses (such as lentils and beans) in favorite sauces such as Bolognese, or spread hazelnut butter on oat cakes.

Foods to eat more of: ANTIOXIDANT FOODS

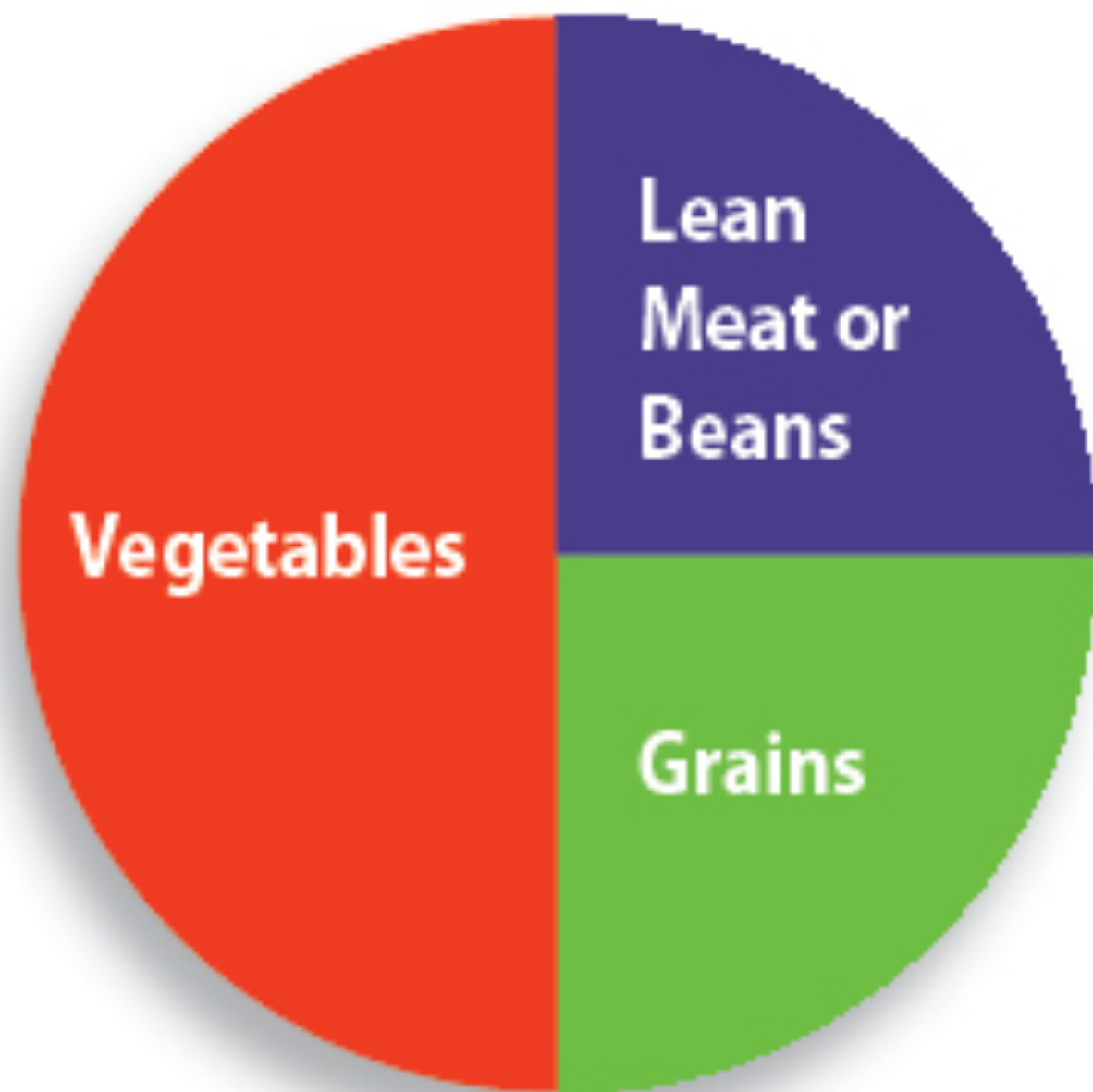
- Antioxidant & nutrient rich foods provide the brain with the nutrients essential for optimum cognitive functioning, and also help protect the brain from damage.
- Examples of foods rich in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants include fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and fish.
- Aim for at least 5 servings of fruit and vegetables per day.
- Top tip: involve children in preparing and even growing fruits and vegetables and they are more likely to try a wider variety of them.

Servings from the Vegetable Group include:

- 1 cup of raw leafy vegetables
- 1/2 cup of other vegetables, cooked or chopped raw
- 3/4 cup of vegetable juice

Servings from the Fruit Group include:

- 1 medium apple, banana, orange
- 1/2 cup of chopped, cooked, or canned fruit
- 3/4 cup of fruit juice



Foods to Eat LESS Of

Refined foods

High salicylate foods

Processed foods

Percentage	React to	Where found
75	salicylates	most fruit, mint, tomatoes, some vegetables; flavours
60-70	preservatives	processed foods e.g. bread, drinks, dried fruit, ham
55	colours	artificial colours; natural colour annatto 160b
40	amines	biogenic amines e.g. chocolate, cheese, processed meat
40	antioxidants	synthetic antioxidants e.g. TBHQ (319), BHA (320), BHT (321)
40	flavour enhancers	MSG, inosinates, guanylates, ribonucleotides 600-635, HVP, yeast extract, natural glutamates
20	dairy foods	milk, yoghurt, cheese, butter
Less than 1	gluten	although some people are affected by wholegrains e.g. wholegrain bread rather than white bread; figures are higher for other symptoms, up to 20% for irritable bowel

Source: Loblay and Swain, 1986

Foods to eat less of: REFINED FOODS

Refined foods have been processed or altered so that they are no longer in their natural state. Examples include: white flour, white rice, white sugar, and products made from these ingredients.

HOW TO REDUCE REFINED FOODS:

- Choose wholegrains; wholegrain bread, brown rice, wholewheat pasta. No white bread, white pasta, white rice.
- Eliminate energy and soft drinks, as well as caffeine.
- Top tip: Replace processed snack foods with homemade alternatives such as smoothies, oat cakes, natural yoghurt with berry puree, homemade wholegrain biscuits.

Foods to eat less of: HIGH SALICYLATE FOODS

Salicylates are natural compounds found in foods from plants.

For example, citrus fruit, berries, tomato sauce and mint flavouring are naturally high in salicylates and so are processed foods with those flavours.

Low salicylate foods include:

Pears, potatoes, green beans, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, celery, lettuce, leeks, garlic, kidney and other beans, golden and red apples, carrots and butternut pumpkin

High salicylate foods include:

Berries, citrus, melons, stone fruit such as plums, grapes, dried fruit, tomatoes, avocados, broccoli and silverbeet.

Foods to eat less of: PROCESSED FOODS

Some additives found in common processed foods may not be beneficial to the brain, and may worsen concentration. These include the below additives:

Allura red AC (E129) found in snacks, sauces, soups

Amaranth (E123) found in cake decorations, jellies and jams

Aspartame (E951) found in snacks, sweets, diet foods and desserts

Benzoic Acid (E210) found in drinks, low sugar products, meat products

Monosodium Glutamate (E621) found in most processed foods

Tatrazine (E102) used as a yellow food colour

Sunset Yellow (E110) used as a food colour

Saccharin (E954) found in diet and no- sugar products

Potassium nitrate found in pate, meats, snacks and cereals

Calcium Sulphite (E226) found in burgers, biscuits and horseradish pulp

The main points

- Variety is key to a healthy diet.
- Eat everything in moderation.
- Eat fresh, unprocessed food.
- Start dedicating more time to the buying, preparing and cooking of food for you and your children.
- Children learn by example, so make sure you set an example of healthy eating!

Complementary therapies for aiding concentration

Nutritional Supplements

- Good quality multivitamin and mineral; look for B vitamins, iron, magnesium and zinc.
- Good quality essential fatty acid blend with omega 3 and 6

Herbal Remedies

- Herbs that calm, soothe and nourish the nervous system may aid in improving concentration.
- Suitable herbs for children include: lemon balm, chamomile, hops, passionflower, skullcap, brahmi, valerian and St John's wort.
- May be taken as tea or a tincture, however seek professional guidance first, especially if your child is on prescribed medication.

Exercise

- Helps burn off steam, improves cognitive function, turns on the attention system, improves concentration.



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SOLUTIONS

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