guest column

Get the Junk Out

How "Bad" Food Impacts Special Needs Children

By Joanna K Chodorowska, BA, NC

our kids are restless, they act out and you can't get control of them. Maybe they have trouble paying attention and learning. Did you ever wonder if there is a connection between what they eat and how they behave? We know that the better the quality of foods you eat, the

better your body will function. And if

you are working with special needs chil-

dren, that attention to quality has to be even more precise.

When dealing with special needs children, parents are faced with additional challenges because these children have a higher sensitivity to toxins and certain food additives than the rest of us. By and large, people seem to be OK with eating almost anything. Special needs children and those with brain injuries tend to have a heightened sensitivity to wheat, soy, artificial additives (sweeteners, colors and preservatives), dairy and sugar. This can also include eggs, sugar and colored dyes. The digestive tract is hypersensitive and so is the brain's reaction to toxins. So if you find your kids are hyperactive or are misbehaving, start by looking at what you are feeding them.

Don't take an "all or nothing" approach right away because that might be a challenge for you as well as your child. When I was preparing to work at the **Institute for Achievement of Human** Potential in Chestnut Hill, Pa. (a facility that works exclusively with brain damaged children), the diet was the first thing that clients needed to focus on with their children.

The first six months was about educating the parents on what to avoid in the diet that will help to calm down and minimize reactions. The foods to avoid were those to which most overexcited kids are allergic: dairy products, wheat, soy, corn, tomatoes, peanuts and citrus fruits. They were also instructed to avoid sugar, high fructose corn syrup, candy and all artificial sweeteners, additives, preservatives and colors. Did you know that artificial colors, sweeteners and additives are known as excitotoxins? Those additives overexcite the brain so it will not function the way it is supposed to. (The book "Excitotoxins: The Taste That Kills" by Russell Blaylock, MD explains this in much more detail).

To provide the necessary nutrition for you and your children, you need to start thinking about natural foods and food products. The more a food is processed,

the more of the nutrients naturally found in foods are destroyed, and the more additives are included. Will you have to cook more? Probably, but that can be an exciting process, too, learning about new foods and how to prepare them. When

quinoa, millet or gluten-free oats as the base. If your child does not eat vegetables, start with some easy items like sugar vou snap peas think and start natural, with a 1/2. organic is cup. Then the next increase it thing to congradually until sider. I wouldn't say you can get at least 1/2 that you have to do cup per meal; then 1 everything organic, but do cup per meal. And do this as the best you can. With vegetables and a family rather than just the children. You fruits, it might not be as much of a necesideally should have 5 to 7 servings (a sity to purchase organic (although purserving being 1/2 cup) of vegetables per chasing from a local farm or produce

Why? The animals are most happy when they eat grass and vegetation from the fields. They also enjoy being outdoors, moving around freely and in sunlight, just like humans. These free-range animal products have fewer injections and no antibiotics (they are less sick to start with) and they also produce a lot of beneficial essential fatty acids, which are not found in animals packed into their pens like sardines.

stand on the side of the road is the next

best thing). But when it comes to your

additives) you want to choose organic if

you can, and farm raised, grass-fed and

protein sources (which can be full of

free range.

The next thing to work away from is wheat, or at least start with using whole wheat or sprouted grains instead of "enriched" flour products. Enriched products just take out the natural germ (which is where the natural bio-available vitamins are) and the bran (the natural fiber to help slow down the digestion of sugars found in grains) so you end up with synthetic vitamins in your products which are never as good as the natural kind.

If you decide to start a more natural regimen, don't do everything at one time. It is best to start with one or two items at a time. If you want to switch from a high-sugar cereal like Frosted Mini Wheats, your children probably won't go directly to regular Mini Wheats happily. So start with mixing the two cereals for a

couple of weeks at half-frosted, and halfday for optimal health. So start small, and regular Mini Wheats. Then gradually increase every few days or every few increase the amount of regular Mini weeks. And get creative here, too. You Wheats and decrease the Frosted ones need to try a vegetable eight different until you end up with only the plain Mini Wheats. Then you may want to start to switch your children from a wheat-based cereal to something with

eliminating the toxins and adding in the real foods. Your family will love you for it. Joanna K Chodorowska, BA, NC is a nutritionist, swim instructor, triathlete coach and competitive triathlete from North Wales, Pa. She is the founder of Nutrition in Motion, specializing in personalized nutrition programs for health-minded individuals, athletes and triathletes. She works with real foods and incorporating healthier

ways before you can deem it something you don't like to eat. If you need help with changing your family's eating habits, it might be wise to contact a nutritionist to help create a plan you can actually use and to help you modify the diet in a multi-step process. A nutritionist can also provide ideas and recipes to help make it more fun and creative, while helping you choose a plan that fits your schedule and that your whole family can live with. So, if you want to have healthier and better behaved children who also learn better, start with





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INFORMATIONAL MEETING

Thursday, January 8, 2009 at 8:45 a.m.

For information, please call 610-667-1284

