

guest column

Get the Junk Out How "Bad" Food Impacts Special Needs Children

By Joanna K Chodorowska, BA, NC

Your 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 children, 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

a couple of weeks at half-frosted, and half-regular Mini Wheats. Then gradually increase the amount of regular Mini Wheats and decrease the Frosted ones 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 quinoa, millet or gluten-free oats as the base.

If your child does not eat vegetables, start with some easy



day for optimal health. So start small, and increase every few days or every few weeks. And get creative here, too. You need to try a vegetable eight different 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 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 options into one's daily routine as a means to gain better health, strength and fitness, and to help people get started on a lifelong healthy meal plan. For more information, visit www.nutrition-in-motion.net.

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