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Healthy eating tips for children with ADHD

By **JOHANNA HICKS** | *Hopkins County Extension Agent/Family and Consumer Sciences*

August 13, 2006 - Texas Cooperative Extension is a great "go-to" source for information. We receive inquiries ranging from managing diabetes to treating tree diseases, from encouraging finicky eaters to consume a healthier diet to treating grasshopper invasion, and everything in-between. If we don't know the answer, we can find it. As an extension of the Texas A&M University, we have a vast array of information at our finger tips that we are glad to pass on to you.

Lately, I received a phone call from an individual who was interested in learning more about nutrition as it relates to children with ADHD. A healthy, well-balanced diet is crucial for every child's development. For children with ADHD, it can also have a positive impact on behavior, energy levels, and overall mood. While there's no magic formula, it's important to make sure your child eats "good-for-you" foods every day. Here a few ideas from Dr. Carol Rice, Extension Health specialist, and Eli Lilly Pharmaceutical Company:

1. Square meals, on the dot. Kids with ADHD benefit greatly from routine, so try to maintain a predictable schedule for meals and snacks.

This adds a rhythm to the day. Eat as a family at the dining table, away from distractions like TV and video games.

2. Spark a picky eater's interest. Most kids can be picky eaters now and then, but they usually like sweet or salty flavors. If your child is finicky, experiment with different flavors, textures, and colors that will make the food more interesting to eat. Make fun-to-drink fruit smoothies or add cut-up fruit to salads.

3. Forge a kitchen connection. Your child may enjoy eating more if he or she helps with the preparation. Assign a specific task (stirring, rinsing fresh fruits or vegetables, flipping the pancakes, etc.) that is tailored to a short attention span. Introduce quick, easy-to-make foods, such as pancakes or grilled cheese sandwiches that the whole family can enjoy.

4. Smarter school eats. To help your child resist unhealthy temptations like vending-machine snacks or sometimes fatty school lunches, pack low-fat, high-flavor sandwiches and an array of healthy snacks like pretzels, dried fruit rolls, or graham crackers.

5. Tip-top tip: create a salad person to make eating vegetables fun for a younger child. Used shredded lettuce for hair, a cherry tomato for the nose, small pieces of broccoli for eyes, and a cucumber or carrot slice for the mouth. Drizzle lightly with salad dressing, and let your child enjoy it!

6. Keep in mind that the more fresh fruits, vegetables and unprocessed foods, the better.

UPCOMING EVENTS

-- Thursday, August 17: 4-H County Council meeting, 6 p.m., Professional Ag Worker's Building, Buford Park. (All 4-H Club presidents and at least one representative from each club are requested to attend, as well as club managers.)

-- Friday, August 18: "Stretching Your Food Dollar", 9 a.m., WIC headquarters

-- Thursday, August 24: Household Arts Contest Volunteer meeting, 5:30 p.m., County Extension Office (light meal provided). Anyone interested in assisting with this year's event is welcome!

-- Saturday, August 26: 4-H Foods Project group, dessert baking party for the 4-H Achievement Banquet, 12 noon, Wesley United Methodist Church (County 4-H Council members meet at 1 p.m. to decorate)

-- Saturday, August 26: County 4-H Achievement Banquet, 6:30 p.m., Wesley United Methodist Church

-- Friday, September 1: 4-H Bowl-and-Enroll, Classic Lanes, 4-6 p.m.

CLOSING THOUGHT

Make the most of the best and the least of the worst - Ethel Sexton



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