

Feed Your Head -- Add “Brain Foods” to the Menu

Although fish has always been known as “brain food,” it doesn't have the market cornered in that respect. Nutrition experts say that there are many foods that boost brain power and help kids go to the head of the class.

Breakfast

The first meal of the day is critical for kids. According to research, children who eat breakfast do better academically and have fewer behavior problems than those who skip the meal. For maximum effect, take a “pass” on the sugary cereals and opt for breakfasts that offer protein and complex carbs.

- Eggs -- Choline, found in eggs, is vital for the creation of memory stem cells. However, because eggs can cause allergic reactions in infants, babies should not be given egg yolks until at least 8 months, and egg whites until 1 year.
- Oatmeal -- A whole grain that is high in fiber, oatmeal digests slowly, providing children with a steady flow of energy. Opt for homemade varieties (they are microwavable) or lower-sugar instant varieties. To make oatmeal more appealing, sprinkle with raisins or other dried fruits and nuts.
- Cereal -- Fortified, whole grain cereals are rich in folate, complex carbs and protein. They also provide vitamin B12, which is linked to memory. Serve low-sugar varieties for breakfast, and keep a bowl handy for after-school snacks.
- Strawberries and blueberries -- These two delicious fruits are high in antioxidants, which has been shown to boost the cognitive functioning of rats, according to researchers who speculate that results are similar in humans.
- Instant breakfast -- If your child is not hungry or doesn't have time to eat, give her a glass of instant breakfast in a plastic cup to drink on the way to school. It will give her enough calories to tide her over until lunch.

The lunch box

Lunchtime is refueling time for kids --a time to put enough energy in their body to get them through the rest of the school day.

If your child eats a school lunch, review the options and make sure he is getting a low-fat, high fiber, high protein meal. If your child brings his lunch to school, make sure it contains all the components of a healthy meal.

- Sandwich -- Pack sandwiches on whole wheat breads, which are rich in fiber and enriched with folate, a B vitamin used to manufacture memory cells in the brain. Pack protein-rich peanut butter and low-sugar jelly, low-fat cheese, low-fat/low-salt meats, and tuna. Make it more interesting by substituting whole wheat tortillas or crackers instead of bread.
- Milk -- Fat-free milk is good source of protein, vitamin D, and phosphorus. Calcium-rich foods are important to growing kids. For a treat, alternate unflavored milk with chocolate milk and strawberry milk.
- Fruit -- Any kind of fruit will help keep kids eating right. Send in cut-up pieces of melon, peeled oranges, pears, etc.
- Water -- While kids don't exactly consider water a “food” it is essential for good health and learning. Kids tend to drink very little at school, but even mild dehydration makes kids listless, lethargic, and irritable. Pack the kids a big water bottle to keep them sipping - and hydrated - throughout the day.

The dinner table

Protein, veggies and starches usually make up the dinner menu. Make sure to choose the right ones!

- Beef -- Experts say that iron deficiency is the most common type of nutritional shortfall in American children, leading to poor performance at school. Lean beef is one of the best absorbed sources of iron around. Don't forget other non-meat sources of protein, such as beans and tofu.
- Fish -- Omega-3, an excellent brain food, is a type of fatty oil that is commonly found in fish such as salmon. In addition, other polyunsaturated fats that contain Omega-6 can be found in many cooking oils such as corn, safflower, and sunflower oils. A proper balance of Omega-3 and Omega-6 is vital for peak brain performance.
- Vegetables -- Sometimes getting kids to eat their veggies can be a challenge. Let the kids decide what they want by letting them loose in the produce aisle of the grocery store. Broccoli and spinach are particularly beneficial to the brain.
- Rice -- All rice contains several of the B vitamins, but brown rice contains more vitamins and minerals as it is not stripped down in the milling process.

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