

### **Centered Eating for ADHD**

As an integrative psychiatrist, I am often asked what dietary measures can be taken to treat ADHD. I know how difficult it can be, for people who are already struggling, to follow a specific diet. Luckily, benefits can be gained through one's approach to eating, rather than anything too specific.

Knowing the neuroscience behind this disorder, I do not believe that it is caused by diet. However, we do know that some of our common ways of eating can promote the symptoms of this disorder. These symptoms include difficulty with concentration, lack of follow-through, low motivation, hyperactivity, impulsivity, blurting things out, feeling restless, emotionally reactive, among others. Changing the way we eat can help with these.

From a dietary standpoint, our brain's stability depends on keeping our insulin levels stable. Foods that are too easily turned to sugar, or sugars themselves, will cause a surge of energy followed by a 'crash'. During the surge, we can see hyperactivity and impulsivity in children and more of a feeling of restlessness and emotional reactivity, in adults. During the 'crash', we see the low concentration, motivation and difficulty with follow-through.

In order to avoid these surges and crashes, look for foods that do not contain sugar and are not easily digested. A cracker may not contain sugar but, it starts breaking down as soon as saliva touches it. If a food starts to break down in your mouth, it is not a good idea (think of bread or candy). Of course sodas and many baked goods also fit in this category. On the other hand, foods high in fiber, whole, unprocessed foods, like quinoa or nuts or vegetables will allow one to stay more centered, on an even keel. Try to eat foods that remain close to the way they came from nature, rather than processed.

It may be difficult, at first, to make this switch. I recommend to take it slowly, substituting a new food for a problem food every few days. For example, if you eat cereal for breakfast, find the one with the highest amount of fiber and lowest amount of sugar and substitute it for whatever you are currently eating. Taking efforts to make what you are eating a little bit better can go a long way. Creating a series of shifts is much more effective in the long run for someone with ADHD. ADHDers often jump into a new diet, with the best of intentions, only to lose interest in the coming days or weeks.

I know, from my own experience, that keeping these guidelines in mind was not only easy to follow but helped me to be more centered.

Obviously, if you are concerned about ADHD, you would also want to consult with a healthcare professional for further treatment options.

Alicia R Maher, M.D. is an Integrative Psychiatrist in Santa Monica, CA. She is also the author of a self-help guide for ADHD entitled "From Scattered to Centered: Understanding and Transforming the Distracted Brain".  
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