

Feed your Brain

Better brain function- who doesn't want that? While many lifestyle factors influence the quality of our brain function, this month we'll focus on nutrition. Children and adults require similar nutrients for our brains to function optimally. It's nothing short of amazing what can happen when families make the effort to incorporate the principles of good brain nutrition in their lifestyles.

Top 10 ways to support better brain function with nutrition this year:

1. **Eat good fats-** Fats provide lubrication to the brain, and supply essential fatty acids necessary for optimal brain function. Choose avocados, nuts, seeds, flaxseed oil, coconut oil, organic butter, olive oil. Include a variety of these good fats with every meal.
2. **Include quality protein-** Protein is digested into amino acids needed for neurotransmitters, those chemical messengers in the brain responsible for many processes including regulating emotions and maintaining focus. The best protein sources are organic meats, nuts, seeds, eggs, a blue-green algae called 'spirulina', green foods, sprouts, and some soy products (tofu, tempeh, and miso).
3. **Eat lots of vegetables-** Veggies provide essential vitamins and minerals and even protein needed for brain function. The darker and more colorful the better. If you just can't bring yourself to eat those greens, or for an additional boost, include a daily dose of a freeze-dried green powder added to juice, applesauce or smoothies.
4. **Drink plenty of water-** Water is a key brain nutrient. A dehydrated brain is a weak brain. Consider water your daily detoxifier. Unfortunately, most tap and bottled water are lacking in the minerals naturally occurring in the quality water we need, and may even contain harmful constituents like BPA from plastics and fluoride and chlorine in tap water. There are many water filters available today. See more info [here](#). The best bottled water options are Mountain Valley Spring water (in glass bottles) and Fiji water.
5. **Try fermented foods-** Kefir, sauerkraut, and kombucha are just a few of the fermented foods that are a natural source of beneficial bacteria that help to balance your gut flora and assist your body in detoxifying. The better care we take of our guts, the better care we take of our brains.
6. **Avoid the artificial-** Artificial ingredients and preservatives literally clog our bodies and livers. Additionally, artificial colors such as Yellow #5 have been shown to contribute to hyperactivity in children. Choosing organic foods as much as possible will also help to lighten the load on your liver, as you won't have to detoxify as many pesticides from your food.
7. **Be aware of your pH-** Acid/Alkaline balance refers to the pH of your blood, urine and saliva and is also key to maintaining a healthy brain. When our bodies are chronically acidic, we leave room for bacteria, parasites and yeast to flourish, which rob our bodies of energy and nutrients needed for our best brain function.
8. **Eat eggs-** Eggs are a wonderful brain-healing food, rich in B vitamins, protein and a commonly deficient nutrient, choline. Eggs are best eaten lightly steamed or fried with organic butter or coconut oil. If you can handle it, eat them on the runny side as excessive cooking damages those nutrients.
9. **Limit your sugar intake-** Sugar has been called the 'enemy of the brain' by some practitioners. Refined sugar is especially harmful as it serves as a stimulant and feeds Candida, a harmful yeast that robs the body of nutrients and clouds brain function when present in excessive amounts in the body. Educate yourself further [here](#).
10. **Consider supplements-** Supplements are a smart idea when it comes to brain function- specifically, a good digestive enzyme, probiotic and fish oil supplement are beneficial for just about everyone. Additional nutrients include magnesium, GABA, and B vitamins. Supplementation can be overwhelming, and it's best to start with the basics. Quality supplements (not usually found at most grocery stores) are worth the extra money as they are better absorbed and utilized and do not contain unnecessary and harmful additives and preservatives.

High Fructose Corn Syrup: Watch Out!

Watch out for commercials sponsored by the Corn Refiners Association that are attempting to debunk the 'myths' surrounding the dangers of High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS). This is in response to a massive movement of healthcare practitioners, nutritionists (like myself) and concerned parents to expose and educate ourselves and others about the dangers of this highly refined synthetic sweetener. Check out the commercial here: [High Fructose Corn Syrup commercial](#)
Amazing. Okay, let's check out the 'facts':

"Its made from corn"- True. High Fructose Corn Syrup is made from corn syrup that has been highly processed to increase its fructose content then mixed with pure corn syrup, which is 100% glucose. The result is a cheap, widely available and utilized sweetener, so highly refined that saying it is 'made from corn' (in support of its safety) is like saying cocaine is made from a plant so its safe to snort up your nose.

"Doesn't have artificial ingredients"- True. HFCS doesn't have artificial ingredients, however, unless you're buying HFCS off the shelf in its 'raw' form, the products that contain it, most likely DO have artificial ingredients. This is just another attempt to use the emerging interest in 'natural' foods as a ploy to push harmful foods to increase profits. Just because actual HFCS doesn't have 'artificial' ingredients doesn't negate the fact that it is HIGHLY REFINED.

"Like sugar, its fine in moderation"- Questionable. To say that HFCS is like sugar is hardly accurate- at least in the way we metabolize it. The term 'sugar' is used widely to refer to many varied forms of sugar cane, which is sucrose, a disaccharide made up of glucose and fructose (the same components of HFCS). Our bodies have an innate mechanism that regulates the release of insulin to uptake the glucose and fructose from the bloodstream as enzymes break them down. However, in HFCS, these molecules are already 'broken down' (they're two separate 'monosaccharides' or single sugars), so our body's natural regulation mechanism is not triggered. Rather than absorbing and utilizing the excess fructose, our liver is forced to convert those molecules to fat and store them as such. This places a tremendous burden on the liver, our already overworked and often underpaid amazing organ working to detoxify our body every moment of our lives. Because HFCS is so sweet, the body registers that it has eaten, however, little of the actual 'fuel' the glucose and fructose is actually used at the cellular level, stimulating cravings for guess what.....more sugar!!

Organizations like the Corn Refiners Association is citing studies that were done on lean women only. What about its effect on a developing body and liver, such as in your child?

You can also check out this beautiful website filled with misinformation about how HFCS is just as safe as other natural sweeteners.

<http://www.sweetsurprise.com/hfcsquickfacts.php>

Please, do not be fooled into thinking that this food is safe in ANY way for your family. And when we have natural sweeteners such as stevia, raw honey, agave nectar, maple syrup and sucanat (cane sugar) that actually have true health benefits, why risk it?

Stuck on soda? There's a soda sweetened with stevia that can be found at Central Market and online: <http://www.zevia.com/>
The ginger root beer and orange soda are my favorite!

Looking out for our kids,

Brandie

Lime in the Coconut

Summer is in full effect, and if the only coconut products you're familiar with are the fragrances in your suntan lotion, read on!

Fact: Coconuts are one of the healthiest foods we can consume. Tribal cultures that consume high amounts of coconut oil and coconut-based products have fewer cases of heart disease, obesity, diabetes and other health problems that we Americans face. "But coconuts are high in saturated fat", you say. Yes, however, all saturated fats are not bad for us. In fact, there is emerging research to support the many health benefits of coconut oil and other tropical oils as we discover that the proposed link between saturated fat intake and high cholesterol and heart disease (known as the Lipid Hypothesis) is hardly factual.

Coconut oil is different from other saturated fats.

Coconut oil is a saturated fat, meaning all of the carbons on the fatty acid chain are 'saturated' with a hydrogen molecule, making this oil more stable and less subject to rancidity and oxidation when heated to high temperatures (i.e. frying). However, these fatty acids are in a category known as 'Medium Chain Triglycerides' or MCTs, as they are shorter than Long Chain Triglycerides. Makes sense. MCTs are more easily digested and oxidized to release energy that our bodies can use, have anti-microbial properties and support healthy immune systems. Research has also shown an increase in HDL (good) cholesterol and a decrease in LDL (bad) cholesterol as a result of coconut oil consumption. If you would like to learn more about this somewhat complex issue of saturated vs. unsaturated fats, I highly recommend reading [The Truth about Saturated Fats](#) by Dr. Mary Enig, PhD, a premier researcher in the field of fat and health.

What's the difference?

If you are already interested in incorporating coconut products into your family's diet, you may be wondering about the difference between the many coconut products out there. Let's take a look at a few:

Coconut Oil- Coconut oil is the oil that is extracted from the meat of the coconut that contains the anti-bacterial, anti-microbial and anti-fungal healing properties mentioned above. Ideally we want to consume the less processed version (unrefined), which has a bit of a coconut flavor. Buy your coconut oil from a health food store like Whole Foods or the Healthy Living department of HEB and Central Market. Look for organic, unrefined and cold-pressed (like any oil).

Coconut Milk- The milk of the coconut is not the liquid that you hear when you shake a coconut around. Its also not what you sipped through the straw of that fancy tropical drink you ordered on your vacation. It is the meat of the coconut (the white part) blended up into a liquid consistency. You can make your own milk from fresh raw coconuts, or much more convenient, you can buy it in a can. Be sure to read labels, as some canned coconut milks have added sugar (particularly in ethnic markets). Be sure to purchase the Whole Coconut Milk as opposed to 'Light', as the Light version has the beneficial fats removed. Remember, we need fat in our diets! My favorite brand is Native Forest Organic Whole Coconut Milk found at Whole Foods.

Coconut Water- Coconut water is the liquid inside young, green coconuts. It is naturally sweet and rich in electrolytes, making it a popular new drink in natural foods stores. You can buy it in cans or small drink cartons. Give it a try this summer over ice with a squeeze of lime- yum!

Shaved and shredded coconut- This is the form of coconut that most of us are familiar with. It is the meat of the coconut, dried and shaved or shredded for use in a variety of recipes. When shopping for it, be sure to buy the unsweetened kind.

How to use coconut in your family's diet.

To receive the most therapeutic benefit of coconuts, it is best to consume the unrefined oil. Because it's a saturated fat, you can safely use it for cooking at high temperatures in stir-frying, making your own sweet potato French fries or other lightly fried dishes. Use it in place of butter for a deliciously healthy treat.

You can use coconut milk in place of milk in recipes or dishes. It is thicker than cow's milk so it may require diluting with filtered water. I use it in coffee, tea, smoothies and cream-based sauces. Because of its high fat content (not a bad thing, remember?), it is quite satiating added to dishes and desserts. I like to add shredded coconut to my home-made trail mix and as a topping on yogurt or cereal. Enjoy!

Holiday Season Immune Support

Its bug time!! With several kids in and out every day at our [clinical nutrition office](#), we've definitely had some bugs come through already. Granted, I don't have direct contact with snotty noses like I did in the classroom last year (darn!); nonetheless, here are a few easy ways to support your family's immune systems through this germ season (and any time).

Vitamin C- Some things never change- like Vitamin C as powerful support for your immune system! Sometimes we try to get fancy, adding herbs like Echinacea and Goldenseal to our natural remedy repertoire. But let's not forget about the basic benefits of a quality Vitamin C supplement throughout the cold/flu season. Adults, your dose is 4000 mg/day for prevention. You can take as much Vitamin C as your body can handle. If you need it, your body will assimilate it. And you'll know if you've overdone it if you experience diarrhea. Take as much as you can handle during a bout with the cold/flu and you will dramatically shorten the life of that bug or virus. Use this formula for figuring your child's vitamin C needs- 4000mg/150 x your child's weight. This is a safe maintenance dose during the cold/flu season; increase as needed (until diarrhea) during an illness. I prefer a powdered or capsule form over tablets with nothing else added. A word to the wise- while Tropicana may want you to believe that their OJ contains gobs of vitamin C, the truth is that by the time that juice makes it to your mouth, it has lost most of the antioxidant and immune support properties contained in fresh orange juice. Its much better to take a supplement in this instance.

Essential Oils- When it comes to immune support, therapeutic-grade essential oils are by far my favorite. Essential oils are like the 'blood' of the plant, carrying oxygen and nutrients to its cells. Not only are their tiny molecules antimicrobial, antifungal, antiviral, and antibacterial, but they usually smell amazing too. I support a company called Young Living Essential Oils and appreciate that their distillation process is such that the therapeutic properties of the plants are retained, as opposed to oils you find in the store that are simply 'aromatic' and not necessarily 'therapeutic'. One of the greatest investments you can make in your family's health is to use Thieves oil on a daily basis. Thieves is a combination of clove, lemon, cinnamon, eucalyptus and rosemary oils- all known for their antiviral and antibacterial properties. You can use the oil directly on the feet, which is absorbed transdermally (through the skin) to act in the bloodstream. It is also safe to take this oil internally (not all oils are safe for consumption)- a drop in a cup of rice or almond milk 3x/day does the trick to kick a cold. Diffusing essential oils is also a fabulous way to kill airborne bacteria lurking in your home or office. We keep one at the school for diffusing oils on a regular basis. Visit www.youngliving.org/nourishfamily for more information.

Go with Garlic- Yes, its smelly, but that's exactly why its so good for you! Garlic contains allicin, which promotes antioxidant activity and functions as a powerful antibacterial and antiviral agent- and gives it that pungent smell. To get the most out of your garlic, its best to chop or press it before using it. If you're going to cook with it, allow chopped garlic to sit 5-10 minutes before heating it so the enzymes that are released in the chopping process can work to make the allicin available for your body's immune system to use.

Take your probiotics- They're in everything these days- even chocolate bars! Probiotics are strands of beneficial bacteria that help to 'fight the good fight' in our guts. The delicate balance of microflora in the gut is largely responsible for the state of our overall immune system. When we are deficient in beneficial bacteria in our guts, we leave room for harmful bacteria to grow out of control- not a good thing. Supplementing with a good quality probiotic is a great idea for everyone, but especially if you've taken antibiotics, if you eat a lot of refined foods and/or if you have a stressful lifestyle. Try probiotic-containing foods too like kombucha tea, all-natural sauerkraut and plain yogurt.

Release stress- Speaking of stress- get it out of your body! Stress has a direct effect on the immune system, largely because a stress response in the body releases the hormone cortisol, known to weaken the immune system. So practice deep breathing on a regular basis, enjoy calming music, receive a massage, get a good night's sleep, be thankful and laugh often. Your immune system will thank you!