

DIET AND BEHAVIOR

The idea that food can affect children's behavior gained popularity in the early 1970s, when California allergist Dr. Benjamin Feingold claimed that the behavior of many of his young patients improved when he placed them on special diets to treat either food allergies. Feingold blamed food additives - especially food dyes - as well as salicylates, which are chemicals that occur naturally in most fruits. Further studies since appear to support this hypothesis: in 2007, a landmark British study published in The Lancet medical journal found that artificial food colors and preservatives increase hyperactivity in children, and a meta-analysis of 34 studies that appeared in the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in 2012 found that artificial food colors had a small but significant effect on ADHD symptoms. The authors of this study found that when patients followed broader elimination diets - excluding not just artificial colors and preservatives, but other suspected triggers such as eggs - the effect was larger. They concluded that as many as 8% of children with ADHD may have symptoms related to artificial food colors and 30% of kids with ADHD may have symptoms that improve when they follow more comprehensive diets that eliminate suspected allergens as well.

HOW TO GET STARTED:

- Start by eliminating only those foods (and vitamins, drugs, and toothpastes) that contain artificial colorings.
- If these initial dietary changes have little benefit, then try the Feingold Program. The goal is to eliminate additives and chemicals. Avoid:
 - Synthetic coloring
 - Artificial flavorings (e.g. imitation vanilla flavoring or "vanillin")
 - Artificial preservative (particularly BHA, BHT, and TBHQ)
 - Salicylates
 - Present in almonds, apples, apricots, aspirin, berries, cherries, cloves, coffee, cucumbers, currants, grapes, nectarines, oil of wintergreen, oranges, peaches, peppers (bell & chili), pickles, plums, prunes, raisins, rose hips, tangelos, tangerines, tea, and tomatoes
 - Artificial sweeteners (such as aspartame)

Acceptable foods on the Feingold Program:

Fruits and vegetables:

Broccoli
Sweet corn
Zucchini
Lemons
Potatoes
Kiwis
Sprouts
Beets
Cabbage
Bananas
Pears

Non-vegetarian foods:

Fresh seafood
Fresh meat
Eggs

Dairy/cereals:

All milk products
Cereals without synthetic colors/additives
Bread without preservatives

- If that doesn't help, then eliminate:
 - Corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, and corn sugar (in soft drinks and other sweetened foods)
 - MSG (monosodium glutamate) and HPV (hydrolyzed vegetable protein)
 - Sodium nitrate (in luncheon meats)
 - Calcium propionate (in baked goods)
- After several weeks, if the child's behavior has improved, every few days restore one eliminated food or ingredient at a time