



## Honoring God With Our Bodies Through Nutrition:

# Attention Deficit Disorders

■ by Stephanie Shelton, PhD, LCSW

As the series on how to glorify God with our bodies continues, the focus of this article will be on attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) and nutritional guidelines that best meet the needs of those with such disorders. First, we need to understand what ADHD is. According to the DSM V, ADHD is persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity which interferes with the one's functioning or development. An individual with ADHD could have a combined presentation of both inattention and hyperactivity, present predominately inattentive or present predominately hyperactive.

As I have worked with many clients with ADHD symptoms, primarily children, one of the main concerns that parents have regarding treatment is the medication. Most parents would prefer to not use medication as part of the treatment since they do not want their child to become dependent on a chemical. One of the first approaches that I recommend is dietary changes. I have come to find that most parents and clients prefer to try the natural approach first before attempting medication.

Below you will find a list of foods that have been shown to either improve or disrupt ADHD. It is best to make small changes and gradually increase so you will not obtain a spirit of defeat. And remember these are suggestions to supplement along with regular Christian counseling and any recommendations received from a medical doctor.

### Protein

Foods rich in protein assist neurotransmitters in the body, meaning they help brain cells communicate with each other. Protein also prevents increases in blood sugar which increases hyperactivity. Examples of good sources of protein include lean beef, pork, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, nuts, soy, and low-fat dairy products.

### Zinc, Iron, and Magnesium

These three minerals all assist the brain's response to neurotransmitters; especially dopamine. Low levels of these minerals correlate with cognitive deficits and inattention whereas normal levels have a calming effect on the brain. Good sources of these minerals are found in lean meats, poultry, seafood, nuts, soy, and fortified cereals.

(Good cereals include: Post Great Grains Crunchy Pecan, Alpen, KIN, Whole Grain Clusters, Uncle Sam, Kashi GOLEAN Crunch, Kashi Overnight Muesli, Oats Overnight, Fiber One)

### Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3s are believed to be important in brain and nerve cell function leading to improvements in mental focus and cognitive function. Examples of foods include cold-water, fatty fish, such as sardines, tuna, and salmon.



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## High-Sugar Foods and Snacks

High amounts of sugar lead to increased hyperactivity and inattention. One item to avoid is fruit drinks (if need be use 100% fruit juice but try to limit to only water as a beverage). Also pay close attention to the food labels; ingredients such as high-fructose corn sweetener, dehydrated cane juice, dextrin, dextrose, maltodextrin, sucrose, molasses, and malt syrup are all forms of sugar.

## Artificial Dyes and Preservatives

Artificial food coloring and preservatives such as sodium benzoate are linked to hyperactivity. Food items to stay away from include colorful cereals, fruit punch and soda.

## A Well-Balanced Diet Honors God

God has created our bodies with needs for certain vitamins and minerals to function properly. Taking care of your body, including eating a well-balanced diet does honor God. A well-balanced diet including vegetables, complex carbohydrates, fruits, and plenty of protein, will improve brain function resulting in more control over behavior and improve attention. A meal plate should include 1/2 fruit and vegetables (with majority vegetables), 1/4 protein, and 1/4 carbohydrates. You should also have several servings of whole grains throughout the day as they are rich in fiber. A diet that lacks needed nutrients may be assisted with the help of multivitamins and other supplements. Be sure to check with a medical doctor before pursuing any supplements.

## How to Monitor Effects of Changes in Diet

You can monitor the results by tracking the length of time you are able to stay on task. Another way to track how children are responding to the diet changes is monitoring their grades and behavior at school. Remember these are suggestions and have been shown through empirical studies to help with ADHD but there is no guarantee as every body is different and responds differently to nutrition. Just keep doing the best you can making little changes daily until you find what works for you. ■



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