



A Is For Apple? How Good Grades Begin at Home.

Many parents have come to dread back to school as much as their children. Hectic schedules; finding quick snacks and easy to pack lunches your kids will actually eat instead of trade or bring back home several day in a row; quick dinners as you rush the kids off to their various after school activities. Let's not forget to mention the inevitable fight to get them to finish their homework. While it's easy to feel you have little control over your children's behavior and learning while they are at school, the truth is that good grades begin at home.

Food For Thought: What's In Your Cupboard?

Over the years many studies have shown that allergies and food sensitivities play a big part in ADHD and behavior disorders, and therefore can affect your child's learning potential (*J Clin Pediatr Dent 2001; Appl Psychophysiol Biofeedback 2003*). In his research Dr. Benjamin Feingold M.D. found that **40% to 50 % of children experiencing learning difficulties improved their grades by removing chemicals and allergens** including; artificial flavours, artificial sweeteners, food colourings, caffeine, sugar and chocolate. Even seemingly healthy foods such as wheat and dairy have been implicated in impaired learning in some children. More recent research supports this showing changes to the diet (along with supplementation of essential nutrients) may be as effective as Ritalin (*Alt Med Review 2003*). Energy drinks may play a large role in learning problems in teens as they can have up to 5 teaspoons of sugar along with caffeine! In other words the foods you give your children can profoundly affect their behavior and grades.

You Are What You Absorb.

While eating whole and natural foods is vital, a **lack of essential nutrients (i.e. vitamins and minerals) can also contribute to learning problems such as poor memory, difficulty focusing and hyperactivity.** Maintaining the correct balance of good fats (omega 3, omega 6 and omega 9) in the brain is the key to optimizing learning potential (*Can J Psychiatry 2003*). In particular children with learning and attention difficulties have been shown to use more of the essential fat known as DHA (*J Mol. Neurosci 2001*). Supplementing with zinc and magnesium may also be helpful in improving concentration and memory and may give your children a greater sense of calm (*J Child Adolesc. Psychopharmacol 2000*). While some children are able to get enough of these nutrients from whole foods, for many reasons children with learning difficulties may not digest or absorb these nutrients effectively or many have a higher

requirement for them. Therefore supplementing with good quality vitamins and minerals can make the difference in getting good grades. Addressing digestive issues such as imbalances in good and bad bacteria can also be helpful.

Scientific Opinion Weighs In

We often hear about the increased risk of diabetes and heart disease associated with being overweight, however it contributes to learning difficulties too! In fact **the more overweight a child is, the more likely he or she is to have learning and behavior problems** (*BMC Psychiatry 2002*). In a review of 40 years of nutrition, Dr. Frank Hu and others at the Harvard School of Public Health found soft drinks and the sweetener high-fructose corn syrup to be particularly bad, as even one can of soda a day can cause a child to put on 15 lbs in a year (*Am J Clin Nut 2006*)!

For the best start on the new school year, a healthy diet that is high in whole and natural foods and low in sugars and chemicals is best. Check with your child's health care provider to determine which supplements are right for him or her.

Valerie Franc completed her training as a Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine and has been in practice for over 7 years. She has an undergraduate degree in Nutritional Sciences and is a Board Certified Hypnotherapist. Firmly committed to communicating naturopathic principles and philosophies, she regularly offers personal development, nutrition and meditation courses and public lectures. Currently she is expanding her practice and can be contacted at M&Y Chiropractic at (905)-898-6644 or Markham Village Naturopathic Clinic at (905)-201-6497.