**TOP 10 NUTRITION TIPS FOR ADHD**

**BEYOND THE BASICS**

**Are you interested in nutrition tips for reducing symptoms of ADHD? We will discuss some nutrition and supplement recommendations to help you along your journey.**



Table of Contents

[1.What is ADHD? 2](#_Toc24112739)

[2.Why is nutrition important in ADHD? 3](#_Toc24112740)

[3. Important nutrition tips 3](#_Toc24112741)

[3.1 Food Sensitivities 3](#_Toc24112742)

[3.2 Protein 4](#_Toc24112743)

[3.3 Omega 3 Fatty Acids 4](#_Toc24112746)

[3.4 Magnesium 5](#_Toc24112749)

[3.5 B Vitamins (B6, B9, B12) 5](#_Toc24112752)

[3.6 Zinc 6](#_Toc24112756)

[3.7 Probiotics 6](#_Toc24112759)

[3.8 Phosphatidyl Serine 7](#_Toc24112762)

[3.9 Iron 7](#_Toc24112765)

[3.10 Vitamin D 8](#_Toc24112768)

[4. Should I take a supplement? 9](#_Toc24112771)

[5. Testing for deficiencies 9](#_Toc24112772)

[6. Where do I go from here? 9](#_Toc24112773)

# ***This information is for educational purposes only. As with any medical advice, always check with your doctor or health care professional for personal recommendations and follow age appropriate recommendations.***

# 1.What is ADHD?

Do you or someone you know have:

*Short attention span*? a challenging time listening, completing tasks, losing items.

*Hyperactivity*? squirming and fidgeting constantly, talking all the time, cannot sit quiet.

*Impulsivity*? Interrupts constantly, irritable, angry or aggressive.

Healthcare professionals use the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth edition (DSM-5) to help diagnose ADHD.

Did you know that according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder affects about 11% of children and about 4% of the adult population has ADHD ([1](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/features/key-findings-adhd72013.html))?

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# 2.Why is nutrition important in ADHD?

Research at Harvard shows that when you eat healthy foods, behaviors are better ([2](https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/nutritional-psychiatry-your-brain-on-food-201511168626)).

Serotonin is important to help regulate mood, appetite and sleep. A large amount of your serotonin is made in the gastrointestinal tract therefore, your digestive health is important for your mental health. Also, many vitamins and minerals (micronutrients) are required by the body to support good health ([3](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28967099)).

# 3. Important nutrition tips

Some of the basic guidelines of an ADHD nutrition plan include limiting processed foods, sugar and foods with dye. We will go beyond these suggestions.

## 3.1 Food Sensitivities

Eliminating foods may help reduce symptoms in many people with ADHD ([4](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21296237), [5](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18431534), [6](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/m/pubmed/22232312/)). There have been several studies showing improved behavior when on an elimination diet. Gluten, dairy and food dyes seem to be common offenders.

I prefer using a food sensitivity test called MRT® (Mediator Release Test). MRT measures sensitivity to 170 foods and chemicals. From your results, we create a personalized anti-inflammatory nutrition plan ([www.nowleap.com](http://www.nowleap.com)). MRT and the LEAP nutrition plan are very helpful in reducing many symptoms.

Food allergies are different than food sensitivities, so it is important to know the difference. Food allergies involve the immune system specifically IgE antibodies. Think about an immediate allergic reaction with a peanut, egg or tree nut allergy. An allergist measures an allergic reaction with a skin prick or blood test.

Food sensitivities also involve the immune system however, it is not IgE mediated meaning it does not involve IgE antibodies like in a peanut allergy. MRT is an end point test which measures mediators (such as histamine, prostaglandins, cytokines) from white blood cells. MRT also measures chemicals reactions (tyramine, solanine, dyes, MSG, caffeine, nitrates).

Food sensitivities often have a delayed reaction, so they are challenging to identify with a typical elimination diet.

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## 3.2 Protein

Protein is important because it stabilizes the blood sugar and helps maintain focus. Protein is also necessary to make neurotransmitters. Make sure sufficient protein is present in every meal ([7](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/6123150)).

###  3.2.1 Food Sources

Good sources of protein for people with ADHD include beef, chicken, fish, eggs, beans, and nuts and seeds.

###  3.2.2 Supplements

Many protein supplements are available including egg, pea, hemp and plant however, it is best to get protein from food sources.

## 3.3 Omega 3 Fatty Acids

Omega 3 fatty acids have shown to beneficial in reducing symptoms of ADHD ([8](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28951787), [9](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27555775)).

These are essential fats for brain function, and we must get them from the diet.

###  3.3.1 Food Sources

Salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines, anchovies are a few sources of omega 3’s. Some plant-based foods that are good sources include flax seeds, chia seeds and walnuts.

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###  3.3.2 Supplements

Supplements are available and contain a combination of EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid). The most beneficial form for ADHD appears to be a higher percentage of EPA than DHA. Gummies and chewables usually do not have sufficient omega 3’s. The best forms are capsules or liquid (which can be put in juice or a smoothie).

## 3.4 Magnesium

Magnesium participates in over 300 pathways in the body and it is necessary for proper neurotransmitter function. It is thought that people with ADHD may have lower magnesium levels ([10](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30807974),[11](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30496768)). Studies show that magnesium (along with vitamin B6) reduce symptoms of ADHD ([12](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16846101)).

###  3.4.1 Food Sources

Higher magnesium foods include pumpkin seeds, almonds, spinach, cashews, soybeans, chocolate, grass-fed dairy, and avocados.

###  3.4.2 Supplements

There are many types of magnesium supplements available. Magnesium citrate is very kid friendly (it is helpful for constipation but if too much, it may have a laxative effect). My preferred forms are glycinate, malate and L-Threonate as they are tolerated and absorbed well. Magnesium Threonate has recently been studied to help with learning and memory ([13](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20152124)).

## 3.5 B Vitamins (B6, B9)

### B vitamin are water-soluble vitamins. B6 plays a role in over 100 enzymatic reactions in the body and plays a role in cognitive development. Vitamin B6 may help to raise serotonin levels and raising vitamin B6 levels may help to reduce ADHD symptoms ([14](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/m/pubmed/15466962/)). Low folate levels are often seen in people with ADHD symptoms and folate may help reduce symptoms ([15](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/m/pubmed/27990293/), [16](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30267523)). Vitamin B12 may also be associated with ADHD symptoms.

### 3.5.1 Food Sources

Sources of Vitamin B6 include chickpeas, salmon, tuna, chicken, turkey, and potatoes.

Folate (B9) is found in beef liver, spinach, asparagus, black-eyed peas, brussels sprouts, avocado and broccoli.

Vitamin B12 is naturally found in animal products so if someone is vegetarian, it is important to check B12 levels.

###  3.5.2 Supplements

Pyridoxal-5-phosphate is the active form of vitamin B6 and helps transport minerals like magnesium across cell membranes. Methyl folate is well absorbed and important for individuals with the MTHFR mutation ([17](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24494987)).

B12 is available in many forms including Methylcobalamin, hydroxycobalamin and adenosylcobalamin.

## 3.6 Zinc

Zinc plays a critical role in the production of neurotransmitters like dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin. Low zinc levels are often seen in children with ADHD and may affect ADHD symptoms ([18](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8959299)).

###  3.6.1 Food Sources

Some foods high in zinc include oysters, beef, crab, lobster, pork, baked beans and chicken.

###  3.6.2 Supplements

Supplements contain many forms of zinc. Zinc picolinate may be better absorbed than other forms of zinc. Zinc carnosine may help protect the gut.

## 3.7 Probiotics

The research field of brain and gut health is rapidly growing as we see a positive relationship between the gut and mental health. Several studies have shown that a healthy microbiome influences mental health ([19](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30414552), [20](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30023407), [21](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=the+effects+on+mental+health+and+hypothalamic-pituitary+nutritional+neuroscience+2015)). A large amount of serotonin is produced in the gut.

###  3.7.1 Food Sources

Probiotic foods include sauerkraut, kimchi, kefir, kombucha, pickles and yogurt.

###  3.7.2 Supplements

Lactobacillus rhamnosus GG was shown in a recent study to reduce the risk of neuropsychiatric disorders later in life ([22](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25760553)). Here is a chart of probiotic strains and health concerns ([23](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5145013/table/t3-46-58/)).

## 3.8 Phosphatidylserine

Studies show that phosphatidylserine reduces some symptoms of ADHD by improving focus and cognition([24](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23495677)). It also has shown to improve memory, decrease stress and help with learning ([25](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25933483)).

###  3.8.1 Food Sources

Soy is a main source of phosphatidylserine as well as white

beans, egg yolks and liver however, it may be challenging to get adequate amounts from food sources.

###  3.8.2 Supplements

Phosphatidylserine supplements are made from soy or other plant sources. Check ingredients if you avoid soy.

## 3.9 Iron

Iron is important for people with ADHD. Lower iron levels (serum ferritin) are often seen in children with ADHD ([26](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28046016)).

###  3.9.1 Food Sources

Heme iron foods is the best absorbed iron and includes meats, poultry and fish. Non-heme sources are fortified foods, vegetables and legumes. Absorption of iron increases when taken with other foods high in vitamin C. Also, limit dairy products when eating foods high in iron as calcium can limit absorption. It is best to get iron from foods sources when possible.

### 3.9.2 Supplements

There are many types of iron supplements available some causing constipation and/or stomach upset. My favorite in iron biglycinate.

## 3.10 Vitamin D

Vitamin D is an important part of general health including bone health and now scientists are looking at vitamin D and mental health. Studies have shown that vitamin D may be beneficial in children and adolescence to support mental health ([27](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28176022)).

###  3.10.1 Food Sources

Food Sources on vitamin D include fatty fish, fortified foods, liver, and egg yolks. Unfortunately, it is challenging to get enough vitamin D from foods alone. Many people get some vitamin D from sun exposure however, with people limiting sun exposure due to skin cancer, the amounts have become less. Also, there is a genetic change where some people cannot absorb adequate vitamin D from the sun.

###  3.10.2 Supplements

Vitamin D supplements are beneficial for many people. Always check your vitamin D level to see how much supplement may be necessary (preferably once a year going into the fall season). If taking a Vitamin D supplement, remember to take with some fatty food as it is a fat soluble vitamin.

# 4. Should I take a supplement?

Talk to your health care professional for personal recommendations.

# 5. Testing for deficiencies

There are several tests your healthcare professional can order to test for deficiencies including zinc, B vitamins, ferritin and vitamin D. Some functional medicine practitioners use micronutrient tests and organic acid tests to check nutrient deficiencies.

# 6. Where do I go from here?

Nutrition can play an important role in managing symptoms of ADHD ([28](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/m/pubmed/22232312)). Nutrition, supplements, exercise, mindfulness and sleep may help to reduce symptoms of ADHD.

Contact me at amy@wellnessrd.com if you would like more information.

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