



Eat these Five Foods *for better focus*

From Kelli Berghoff,
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Everyone knows we need food for physical energy. We also know that our kids need the right foods to help their bodies grow. But food is so much more than fuel for muscles, bones, and our hearts. Nutrients in our food, like antioxidants, zinc, and magnesium, play a crucial role in supporting brain health and function through the process of neuroplasticity—the brain’s ability to form new neural connections.

Food is powerful. Food will not change development – but it can either help to give you optimal fuel and energy, or it can create inflammation and spikes and crashes in mood and regulation. Whether your kids like broccoli, burgers, or broccoli burgers, this guide will help you understand how feeding your family the right foods—and avoiding the wrong foods—can improve brain function as well as your ability to focus and stay calm—no matter how picky your eaters are.

Food Choices for Optimal Brain Function

So, if foods have the power to optimize brain health, what foods should we be eating? We've created the below list of five important foods to choose for better focus and mood for the whole family. We've picked out foods with multiple benefits to brain health and given families our best recipes for getting kids to eat them...regularly.

And don't worry, you don't have to skip pizza night or the occasional night out. But start thinking about getting more of the below recommendations and high sources of protein in their diet every meal. Here are some easy ways to make that happen—and with as little tears as possible.



SALMON
Omega-3 Fatty Acids
Source of High Protein



BLUEBERRIES
Antioxidants
Phytochemicals &
Potassium



SPINACH
Magnesium
Iron Antioxidants



DARK CHOCOLATE
Flavonoids
Phenylethylamine (PEA)



EGGS
Choline
Vitamin B12 & Folate

Salmon

Salmon is an excellent choice for several reasons. Firstly, it's a great source of protein. Combining protein with carbohydrates helps stabilize blood sugar levels and provides sustained energy throughout the day, reducing impulsivity and hyperactivity. Additionally, salmon is rich in iron, essential for cognitive function, and omega-3 fatty acids, crucial for brain health. Studies suggest that omega-3s may improve focus and attention in individuals with ADHD.



Ingredients:

1. **Glaze:** Honey, sriracha, soy sauce, fresh ginger
2. **Salmon:** You'll need one and a half pounds of skinless salmon fillets. You can use fresh or thawed, frozen fish.

Honey Sriracha Baked Salmon

Directions:

1. **Prep:** Preheat the broiler with a rack six inches below it, and line a rimmed baking sheet with nonstick foil.
2. **Honey Sriracha Salmon Sauce:** Stir the honey, sriracha, soy sauce, and ginger in a small bowl.
3. **Broil the Salmon:** Cut the salmon into one-inch cubes and place them on the baking sheet with a little space in between. Brush the fish with the glaze and broil it for three to four minutes. Serve over rice.

Spinach

Spinach is a nutritional powerhouse, packed with magnesium, iron, vitamins A and C, and antioxidants. Magnesium supports nerve function and mood regulation, while iron is crucial for cognitive function and attention. Additionally, spinach's antioxidants, like vitamins C and E, protect brain cells from oxidative stress and inflammation. Incorporating spinach into your diet can support overall brain health and potentially alleviate symptoms of conditions like ADHD.

Spinach-Kiwi Freezer Pops



Ingredients:

1. Yogurt (substitute dairy-free yogurt of choice)
2. Banana
3. Kiwi
4. Baby spinach
5. Optional: chia seeds, hemp seeds, avocado, and/or almond butter

Directions:

1. Add ingredients to a blender.
2. Blend until very smooth.
3. Add to a freezer popsicle mold
4. Let freeze at least 4 hours, then serve.

Blueberries

Blueberries are rich in antioxidants, such as vitamins C and E, which protect brain cells from oxidative stress and inflammation. Antioxidants neutralize free radicals, reducing oxidative stress and supporting overall brain health. Research suggests that individuals with ADHD may have higher levels of oxidative stress. Additionally, antioxidants found in blueberries may enhance neurotransmitter function, reduce inflammation, and improve attention and focus in individuals with ADHD. Incorporating blueberries into your diet can provide these brain-boosting benefits.



Ingredients:

1. 6 eggs
2. 1 1/2 cups dairy-free milk
3. 1/2 cup coconut flour
4. 1 teaspoon vanilla
5. 1 teaspoon cinnamon
6. 1/2 teaspoon salt
7. 1 tablespoon maple syrup
8. 2 cups fresh or frozen blueberries
9. 2 tablespoons coconut oil

Blueberry Oven Pancake

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Grease 9 x 13 baking dish with coconut oil. Spread the blueberries out evenly in the bottom of the dish.
2. In a blender, combine eggs, dairy-free milk, coconut flour, vanilla, cinnamon, salt and maple syrup. Blend until smooth. Pour into prepared dish.
3. Bake for 25-30 minutes.
4. Let set for 5 minutes before cutting into squares and serving. Serve with additional toppings if desired, such as maple syrup, sliced banana or cinnamon.

Dark Chocolate

Dark chocolate (>70% cocoa) is packed with powerful antioxidants, like cocoa flavonoids, which boost cognitive function by increasing blood flow to the brain. These flavonoids, particularly flavonols, enhance memory, focus, and learning. Dark chocolate also contains compounds such as phenylethylamine (PEA) and theobromine, which stimulate the production of endorphins and serotonin in the brain, promoting feelings of pleasure, happiness, and relaxation. Incorporating dark chocolate into your diet can provide these brain-boosting benefits, supporting overall cognitive function and mood.

Six Ingredient Granola Bars

Ingredients:

1. 1 cup packed, pitted dates
2. 1/4 cup honey (or sub maple syrup)
3. 1/4 cup creamy, natural peanut butter or almond butter
4. 1 cup roasted unsalted almonds, loosely chopped
5. 1 cup unsweetened dark chocolate chips
6. 1 1/2 cups rolled, gluten free oats

Ingredients Tip: If your dates don't feel sticky and moist, soak them in water for 10 minutes, then drain before processing. This will help the bars stick together better.

Directions:

1. Process dates in a food processor until small bits remain, about 1 minute. It should form a "dough" like consistency.
2. Optional step: Toast your oats in a 350 degree oven for 15 minutes or until slightly golden brown, stirring occasionally. Otherwise, leave them raw.
3. Place oats, almonds and dates in a bowl – set aside.
4. Warm honey and nut butter in a small saucepan over low heat. Stir and pour over oat mixture and then mix, breaking up the dates to disperse throughout.
5. Once thoroughly mixed, transfer to an 8x8 dish or other small pan lined with parchment paper so they lift out easily.
6. Press down until uniformly flattened. Cover and let set in fridge or freezer for 15–20 minutes to harden.
7. Remove bars from pan and chop into 10 even bars. Store in an airtight container for up to a few days. I kept mine in the freezer to keep them extra fresh, but it isn't necessary.

Eggs

Eggs are linked to brain health for a variety of reasons. They are rich in B vitamins (primarily B12 and folate). But, more so, they are a rich source of choline. Choline is an essential micro-nutrient that helps our bodies make acetylcholine, a key neurotransmitter that helps regulate our brain function, primarily our mood, but also our concentration including attention and focus.



Turkey Sausage Egg Cups

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350. Spray a muffin tin with cooking spray.
2. Cook the sausage in a skillet and drain off any excess grease.
3. Chop the bell pepper and spinach. Beat the eggs.
4. Divide the sausage and veggies evenly among the muffin cups.
5. Pour beaten eggs over the sausage and veggies, filling each cup.
6. Bake for 20-24 minutes or until eggs are set. Let cool slightly and remove from the pan.

Ingredients:

1. 10 Eggs
2. Turkey Sausage (store-bought, we like Applegate Farms)
3. Red Bell Pepper (other colors are fine too)
4. Spinach
5. Avocado Oil Cooking Spray

Honorable Mentions

We couldn't stop at just 5 foods. If you're trying to go the extra mile, don't forget about these honorable mentions below.

Water

Hydration: Staying hydrated is essential for cognitive function and overall health. Encourage children to drink plenty of water throughout the day and limit sugary beverages, which can cause energy crashes and mood fluctuations.



Walnuts

Walnuts are a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, essential for brain health. Studies indicate that omega-3s, such as EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid), found in walnuts, may enhance focus, attention, and mood in individuals with ADHD. These fatty acids play a crucial role in supporting overall brain health, making walnuts a valuable addition to the diet for cognitive function and mental well-being.



Making Strides Toward Brain-Healthy Choices

Incorporating healthy foods into everyday routines can be challenging, but with some planning and creativity, it's possible to make nutritious eating a seamless part of family life. Here are some tips to help families incorporate healthy foods into their daily routines:



Plan Meals Ahead: Take time to plan meals for the week ahead, including breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. Create a shopping list based on your meal plan to ensure you have all the necessary ingredients on hand.



Involve Kids in Meal Planning: Get your kids involved in meal planning and preparation. Allow them to choose healthy options for meals and snacks, and involve them in grocery shopping and meal preparation. This can increase their interest in trying new foods and make mealtime more enjoyable for the whole family.



Make Healthy Swaps: Replace processed and sugary foods with healthier alternatives. For example, swap sugary cereals for whole-grain options, replace soda with water or flavored water, and opt for fresh fruits and vegetables instead of chips or cookies for snacks.



Keep Healthy Snacks Accessible: Stock your pantry, fridge, and counter-top with healthy snacks like fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, yogurt, and whole-grain crackers. Keep these items easily accessible so that family members can grab them when hungry.



Prepare Snack Packs: Pre-portion snacks into individual containers or snack bags for easy grab-and-go options. This can help prevent overeating and make it convenient for family members to take healthy snacks with them when on the go.



Set Regular Meal Times: Establish regular meal times and sit down together as a family to enjoy meals whenever possible. Family meals provide an opportunity to connect, share experiences, and model healthy eating behaviors.



Get Creative with Cooking: Experiment with different cooking methods and recipes to make healthy foods more appealing to the whole family. Try new flavors, seasonings, and ingredients to keep meals interesting and exciting.



Be a Role Model: Set a positive example by modeling healthy eating habits yourself. Children are more likely to eat nutritious foods if they see their parents enjoying them too.



Celebrate Food Together: Make mealtime a fun and enjoyable experience by involving the whole family in cooking, setting the table, and cleaning up afterward. Use mealtime as an opportunity to talk, laugh, and connect with each other.



Be Patient and Persistent: Introducing new foods and healthy eating habits may take time and patience. Be persistent and continue offering a variety of healthy options, even if they are initially met with resistance. Over time, tastes can change, and family members may become more open to trying new foods.

By incorporating these tips into your family's daily routines, you can promote healthy eating habits and foster a positive relationship with food for everyone in the household.

A HOLISTIC BRAIN HEALTH PROGRAM

Improve attention, cognition and overall well-being with the Brain Balance Program®.

Our integrated approach combines cognitive, physical and sensory training with nutritional guidance to strengthen and build brain connectivity without the use of medication. Stronger connections translate to improved attention, behaviors, and social-emotional well-being.

Your dedicated performance coach will meet with you weekly to help your child achieve his or her goals. Your nutrition coach will customize an eating plan to support your child's body & brain for optimal wellness and program outcomes.

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About Kelli, Brain Balance's Director of Nutrition

Kelli Berghoff is a Registered and Licensed Dietitian with over 20 years experience working with both adults and children to optimize physical, cognitive and brain health through nutrition. She also has a Master's degree in Healthcare Leadership and has been leading nutritional teams for well over a decade. As the mom of two school aged boys, she knows the importance of healthy eating while maintaining a busy active lifestyle. Kelli lives in Charlotte, North Carolina with her husband, two boys and their two Golden Retrievers.

