

Using Food and Nutrition to Improve ADHD & Autism



Diets and Nutrition That Help

By Julie Matthews, Certified Nutrition Consultant

In article 1, *What The Science Says*, you learned that many childhood disorders (including autism, ADHD, asthma, allergies, and more) have similar underlying physical and biochemical conditions. And you gained an understanding of WHY dietary intervention helps. I gave you an overview of the science known today about factors affecting autism and other childhood conditions. And I explained the factors that influence reactions to foods and nutrient deficiency. We know that many children with autism have:

- Increased Inflammation – gut, brain, and systemic inflammation
- Opiates in their urine from gluten and casein
- Poor methylation (needed for neurotransmitter activation)
- Poor detoxification – more risk of harm from environmental chemicals and reactions to food additives
- Poor digestion – leading to nutrient deficiencies, negatively affecting every system

When conditions like autism are perceived as “whole body disorders,” it becomes apparent that improving

the health of body, brain, and systemic functioning is likely to affect improvements in mental health, learning, and behavior.

In this article, I will explain the use of various healing diets, and what an overall nourishing diet looks like. I will include how each unique person needs an individualized nutrition approach to their food, diet, and nutrition choices.

Two Practices

“Dietary Intervention” is commonly misperceived as involving only the removal/elimination of foods from one’s overall diet (food & nutrition regime). While avoiding problematic foods is vital, adding nourishing foods is equally important.

Following an intentional strategy about food and nutrition intake (nourishing hope) includes two practices:

Practice One – AVOID the bad stuff—foods that are inflammatory, damaging to the gut, or feeding dysbiosis.

Practice Two – ADD in foods for good nutrition—supplying needed nutrients and probiotics (good bacteria).

For example, while the GFCF diet technically removes *only* gluten and casein, there’s more to it. Practice Two is about making the diet healthy and nourishing. Don’t accidentally load up on gluten and dairy-free candy, cookies, soda pop, and more.

Supplying the body what it needs to engage natural healing processes by adding healthy foods is critical to the success of dietary intervention and crucial to the health of your child.

Some people and institutions misguidedly aim to deter you from embarking on a specialized food and nutrition plan for your child, because they think you may forget about Practice Two (Add) and inadvertently neglect to ensure your child receives the nutrients being “lost” by avoiding milk and wheat. Don’t let this happen to you. Avoid the foods causing a problem, and add plenty of good nutrition in.

PRACTICE ONE – Avoid Offending Foods and Choosing a Special Diet

By avoiding or removing offending substances first, you begin by get rid of foods that burden the system, and

Nourishing Hope is a scientifically supported approach to improving autism & ADHD



the areas of inflammation/pain, digestion, and energy/mood such as: headaches, GI inflammation, diarrhea, constipation, hyperactivity, or anxiety. Food sensitivities can also trigger asthma attacks, migraine headaches, eczema, and more.

therefore have an immediate positive impact. These substances can be food additives, food allergens/proteins, or natural food compounds.

Artificial Additives

The easiest and most important initial action, no matter which diet you follow, is to stop eating (or feeding your child) artificial ingredients and junk food. Artificial ingredients are highly toxic and very difficult for the liver to breakdown—they are associated with hyperactivity¹, asthma^{2,3}, aggression, irritability, anxiety, depression⁴, headaches, and sleep disturbances. Once you realize the deleterious nature of certain foods, you'll naturally choose not to include them, or "eliminate" them, from your child's diet.

Special Diets

Most special diets primarily focus on certain problematic foods that need to be avoided - these may be artificial additives, food allergens such as dairy, or natural food chemicals like salicylates. Each special "Diet" has certain "rules." Usually, the rules include foods to remove, but may not focus on nutritious foods to add, so you'll want to do so. These rules are based on avoiding particular foods that cannot be processed by certain people

– they may lead to inflammation, aren't tolerated based on biochemistry, or feed pathogenic microorganisms in the gut.

For example, the popular Gluten-free and Casein-free (GFCF) diet avoids wheat and dairy foods - because for some people those proteins create inflammation or opiate-like compounds. Other diets remove soy, corn, and other inflammatory foods. The Paleo diet eliminates grains and other foods, while The Specific Carbohydrate (SCD) and Gut and Psychology Syndrome (GAPS) diet, remove grains and say "no" to complex sugars and starches.

After years of dietary intervention by thousands of parents and practitioners, a number of diets have been identified as helpful for autism. This presents great opportunity for nourishing hope for these children, but can create some confusion about where to begin.

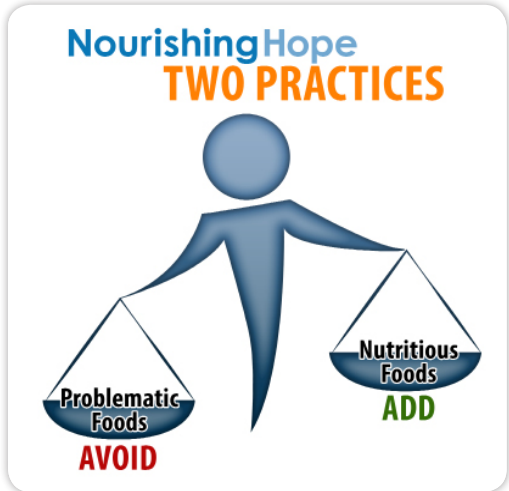
Typically, GFCF is a good place to start. It's one of the most helpful diets, and least restrictive. I've included a chart of some of the healing diets to consider—for more information on the specifics of the diets, common pitfalls, and beneficial uses, see my book, *Nourishing Hope for Autism*.

Food Allergies and Sensitivities

Food allergies and sensitivities (and their accompanying symptoms) are common in children with autism, ADHD, asthma⁵, and beyond. According to Dr. Kenneth Bock in *Healing the New Childhood Epidemics*, "Food allergies have increased by approximately 700 percent in just the last ten years." A food allergy (IgE reaction) is an immediate immune response that includes symptoms such as a rash, hives, sneezing, or anaphylaxis.

A food sensitivity (IgG reaction) is a delayed immune response that includes chronic symptoms in

Because food allergies and sensitivities affect so many bodily systems, reducing them can make a significant difference in how a child feels and behaves. Doris Rapp, M.D. has been studying and treating children with allergies for many years. In her book, *Is This Your Child?*, Rapp describes possible symptoms of allergy (and sensitivity) reactions in toddlers: red ears and cheeks, dark eye circles and bags, glassy and glazed eyes, bloating, belching, diarrhea and/or constipation, headaches, runny nose, whining, screaming, hyperactivity, fatigue, aggression, depression, and refusal to be touched.



Parents routinely report that when they remove certain problematic foods symptoms improve; subsequently, children feel better and have greater capacity to pay attention and learn. Clear of these immune and digestive system reactions, they often make big gains in language and other areas of learning, behavior, and overall health. This can mean profound improvement for children with autism, ADHD, and other childhood disorders.

Opiates from Gluten and Casein

The two food sensitivities with the biggest negative effects for many

FOOD ADDITIVES AND INGREDIENTS TO AVOID

Artificial colors: Red #40, Yellow #5

Artificial flavors: Vanillin

Preservatives: BHA, BHT

Monosodium Glutamate: MSG,

Hydrolyzed Vegetable Protein,

Autolyzed Yeast, Yeast Extract

Artificial Sweeteners

Trans Fats



Opiates are addicting—and children often have strong cravings and preference to wheat and dairy foods such as pasta, bread, cheese, and milk because of it!

children with autism and ADHD are gluten (the protein in wheat) and casein (the protein in dairy). They are challenging for many people to digest and assimilate. In addition to being able to create the symptoms of allergy that Dr. Rapp describes, gluten and casein containing foods, (when not properly broken down by digestion), become a source of inflammation, and can sometimes form opiate-type compounds that mimic morphine—this can dramatically affect the brain, body, and resulting behavior, which is what is seen in autism^{6, 7, 8}.

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Gluten-Free Casein-Free Diet

Parents typically begin dietary intervention with the GFCF diet. I've found it one of the most effective ways to begin. It is less restrictive than grain-free diets, while still being a stepping stone toward them (if needed).

These proteins can be very inflammatory, leading to digestive problems such as diarrhea, constipation, gas, bloating - as well causing opiate-like reactions and other

symptoms such as foggy thinking and inattentiveness.

Without the foods that burden and inflame the body, systems can improve. Improved digestion is the number one thing parents report to me after beginning GFCF. Next, is that their children's speech improved after starting this dietary approach.

Other benefits parents report with GFCF include: improved attention and eye contact, less hyperactivity, better sleep, and less picky eating.

A common misconception is that "dietary intervention" only helps kids with digestive issues.

NOT TRUE— because gluten affects people differently, it can be a problem without you noticing or having digestive symptoms.

The GFCF diet avoids all foods containing gluten, the protein found in wheat, rye, barley, spelt, kamut, and commercial oats, and casein, the protein found in dairy. There are many new commercially available products and recipes, making it easier than ever to go GFCF.

Some of the foods to avoid (sources containing offending proteins) are

obvious. You'll need to avoid any breads, crackers, pasta, or bakery items made with wheat and other gluten grains, and any dairy foods such as milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, and cream from any animals. But some sources can be sneaky and/or may contain undisclosed (gluten or casein-containing) ingredients, i.e:

- Soy sauce (except gluten-free)
- Potato chips and fries (often dusted with gluten during processing and not listed on label)
- Malt (derived from barley)

Be careful not to introduce a bunch of GFCF junk foods such as cookies, candy, and chips. Just because they do not include gluten or casein does not mean they are healthy. These foods can play a transitional role, though only when you're starting out. Avoid over-reliance on them.

Get my free GFCF Success Guide to help you plan and implement the GFCF diet for your child including:

- Gluten and casein-foods to avoid
- GFCF alternatives
- Meal Ideas
- Further GFCF Tips, such as avoiding cross-contamination and the use of supplementation.



Healing Diets

There are many diet and nutrition approaches to consider based on the BioIndividual Nutrition™ needs of each child.

To determine the best dietary approach for a particular individual, you must consider: digestive capacity, bio-individuality, family history,

inflammation, symptoms present, and more. The diet that's best for one person, may not be right for another with different circumstances.

Any of these diets can be healing: GFCF (Gluten-free Casein-free), SCD (Specific Carbohydrate Diet), GAPS Diet (Gut and Psychology Syndrome), Paleo, Low oxalate, Body Ecology, Failsafe, Feingold, Low FODMAPS, or another diet.

Determining which diet (or combination of dietary principles) you or your child needs (while ensuring good overall nutrition) is the process and objective of nourishing hope.

Published studies continue to support the use of special diets and highlight the underlying biochemistry that plays a role. I've included some of that research in the Healing Diets Chart.

Grain-free diets such as: SCD, GAPS Diet, and Paleo have been found to be particularly helpful with inflammatory gastrointestinal conditions, blood sugar stability, and other needs. Low salicylate and low oxalate diets are very important for certain individuals depending on their biochemical makeup. It's important to understand the range of dietary strategies and the rationale behind them.

I encourage you to read my book, *Nourishing Hope for Autism* for more information on these special diets.

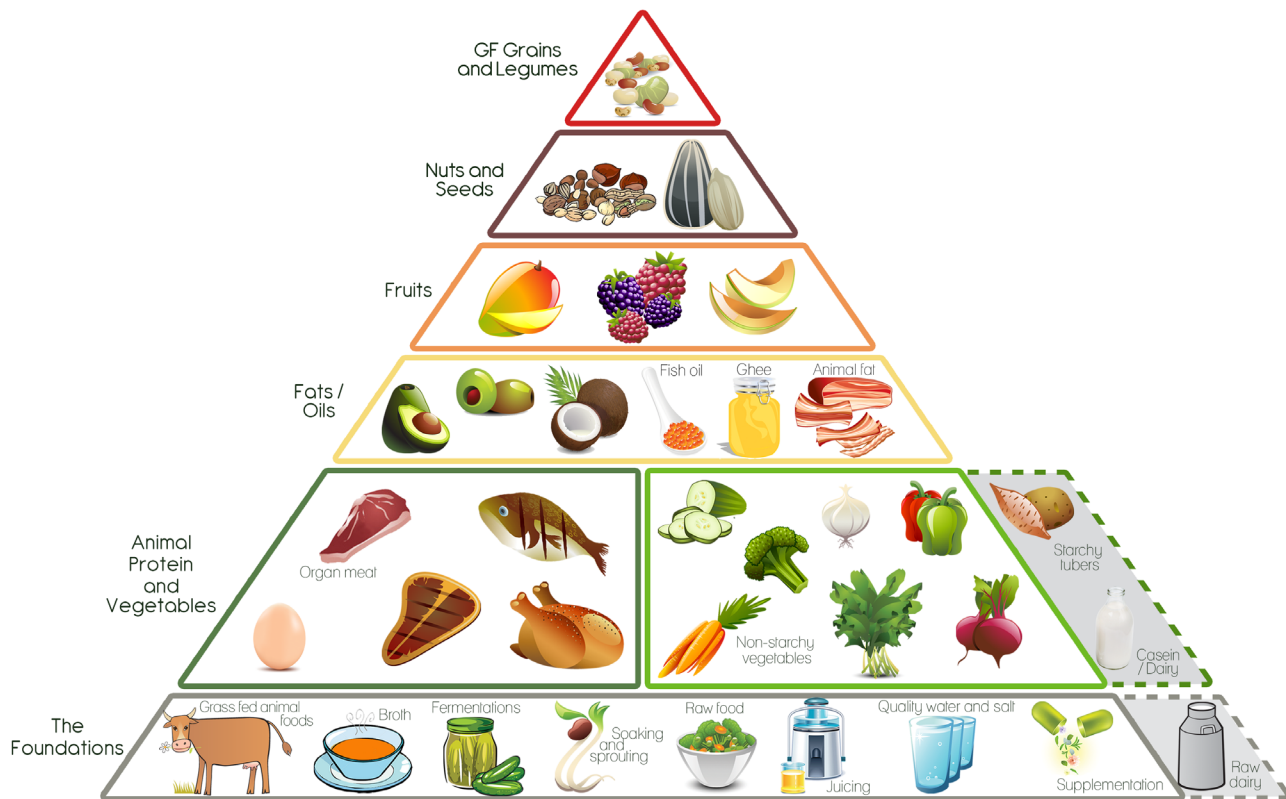
HEALING DIETS

BENEFITS

<p>GFCF (Gluten-free and Casein-free) No gluten (wheat, rye, barley, spelt, kamut, and commercial oats) or casein (dairy)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easiest place to begin • Reduce gut inflammation and digestive symptoms⁹ • Reduce opiates^(6, 7, 8) • Reduction in autistic symptoms^{10, 11, 12}
<p>Food Sensitivity, Elimination/Rotation Eliminating or rotating all other food sensitivities: Soy, corn, eggs, citrus, peanuts, chocolate, cane sugar</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up on GFCF to refine food sensitivities • Food sensitivities in ADHD^{13, 14}
<p>Feingold Diet/Failsafe Diet Removes food additives. Restricts high phenolic foods, including all artificial ingredients and high salicylate fruits such as apples, red grapes, and berries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce hyperactivity¹⁵, behavior, irritability, red cheeks • Helpful when children have food addictions to: grapes, apples, artificial ingredients
<p>Grain-Free Diets SCD (Specific Carbohydrate Diet) Gut and Psychology Syndrome (GAPS) Diet Restricts carbohydrates to only fruits, non-starchy vegetables, and honey. No grains, starchy vegetables, or mucilaginous fiber. Paleo diet: No grains, no beans, and no refined sugar.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often helpful for more severe gut inflammation, especially when gluten-free and casein-free is not enough. • People low in carbohydrate enzymes. Study of children with autism low in carbohydrate digesting enzymes^{16, 17} • Study on SCD Diet showed benefit for inflammatory bowel disease¹⁸
<p>Low FODMAPS Removes fermentable carbohydrates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies on Crohn's and Colitis show Low FODMAPS was beneficial^{19, 20}
<p>Body Ecology Diet Balances gut flora and combines principles of anti-yeast diets including no sugar, acid/alkaline, fermented foods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-candida diet • Populating good bacteria
<p>Low Oxalate Diet Restricts high oxalate foods (nuts, beans, greens)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study showed children with autism had high oxalates²¹ • Helpful when oxalates contribute to pain, dybiosis, and poor cellular energy • Reduces inflammatory/pain related compounds

DIETARY INTERVENTION - REPORTED IMPROVEMENTS

Language
Attention and focus
Learning and cognitive function
Eye contact and socialization
Less hyperactivity and ADHD
Less Irritability and aggression
As well as physical improvements in:
Diarrhea/constipation, sleep, skin rashes



Avoid Gluten and Soy, and avoid Casein as needed - refine per oxalates, salicylates, starches and grains. © Julie Matthews / Nourishing Hope • NourishingHope.com

The Nourishing Hope Food Pyramid

PRACTICE TWO - ADD NUTRITION

Stopping the offending foods gets you started. And the healing journey continues as you learn to understand and master using good nutrition to underscore any diet you choose.

When following any specialized diet, boosting nutritional intake is key. It's beneficial (and sometimes required) to introduce nutrient-dense and probiotic-rich foods to the diet. They supply your child's body with the vitamins, minerals, fatty acids, amino acids, and good bacteria it needs to promote healing. They need calcium and other nutrients that can be in short supply with picky eaters.

Many children with ADHD and autism (and others), have nutritional deficiencies such as vitamins B6 and B12, calcium, zinc, folic acid, and many others. This is partly due to our poor modern diet which is sorely lacking. These nutrients are vital to the functioning of the digestive tract,

immune system, detoxification, brain function, and cellular function. It is imperative to get good nutrition, i.e. nutrients, into children, all children, and especially picky eaters and children with autism.

I'll teach you about adding good nutrition through the framework of the Nourishing Hope Food Pyramid.

NOURISHING HOPE FOOD PYRAMID

After working with dozens of healing diets and customizing approaches for the BioIndividual Nutrition™ needs of children with autism and other clients addressing varied conditions, I've distilled the "best of the best" foods and dietary principles for healing and healthy children. It's called the Nourishing Hope Food Pyramid.

Foods toward the foundation are easiest to digest, most nutrient-dense, most healing (and least likely to create a negative reaction). It serves as a guide and support for every healing

diet and preventive approach to food and nutrition, and can be customized to fit any special diet. For example, grains (gluten-free) at the top means they would generally be eaten in smaller quantities (or for some, not at all) - they are the foods most likely to not be tolerated, so they are at the top.

I initially created the Pyramid to help children with autism focus on the most nutrient dense and easy to digest foods - based on my experience (research and clinically) that this approach was most healing and helpful. I also wanted a framework that would support all special diets, because each person is unique and there is no one-fits-all diet.

During the creative process of the pyramid, after giving careful thought to a dozen different healing diets and what they have in common that supports healing, I placed the foods and food groups on the pyramid. Upon stepping back, I realized that the foods at the core were what our ancestors ate (Paleo). This was an exciting confirmation for me--that the

foods we evolved eating are the ones we should focus on for good health and healing today.

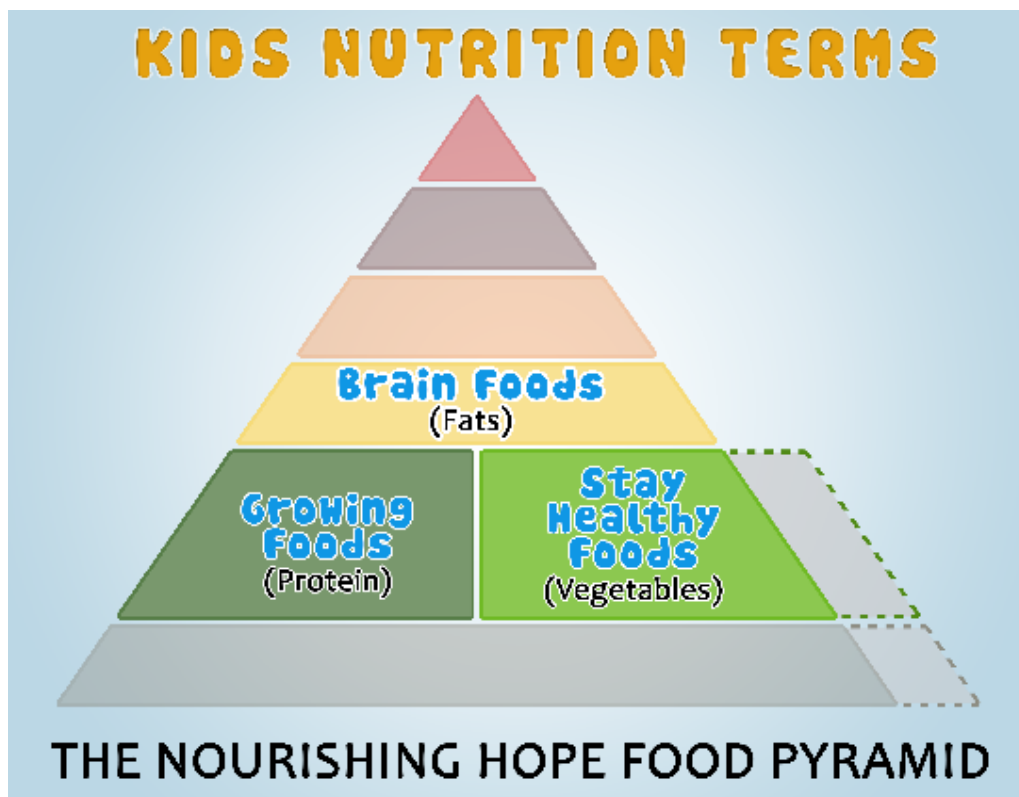
Let's explore some of the pyramid and share some of the nutrient-dense foods and ways to boost nutritional intake and provide the body the good bacteria the gut requires to be healthy.

Pyramid Foods to Focus on

Animal Protein. Protein provides all of the important building blocks, amino acids, for growth and healing. Animal protein supplies all of these essential amino acids in a form that's typically well tolerated and digested, as well as important fats and fat-soluble vitamins that are not available in plants. Red meat, poultry, organ meat, fish, and eggs are all healthy choices (assume there are no food allergies to them). Other plant protein foods such as nuts and beans are also included in daily protein choices; however, since meat is generally easier to digest and contains all of the essential amino acids needed for growth and repair, animal protein is the priority.

In the Nourishing Hope Food Pyramid model, as a nutrition learning tool for the kids, I call protein foods - "Growing Foods."

Vegetables. Getting more vegetables into your child can be challenging. They need to become comfortable with the texture and bitter flavors. Encourage eating vegetables by offering more of them at meals. It's helpful to begin by pureeing and adding the vegetable to things the child already enjoys eating,



such as pancakes or muffins. Ideally, you'll do less of these grain-based, starch-rich foods but initially, any vegetables are good, as long as you are not adding more junk to make up for the vegetables. For kids, I call vegetables - "Stay Healthy Foods."

Good Fats. Fats are important for brain growth and development, cellular function, mood, learning, and many more needs. Getting a variety of fats from many sources including saturated fat is important: plant oils like olive oil, avocado, and coconut oil, fish oils, and animal fats too. Omega 3 supplementation has been shown to be helpful for ADHD^{22, 23}, as well as for improved speech in children with autism²⁴. Processed and highly refined oils like canola, safflower, corn and soy, should be avoided because research shows oxidized oils have many negative health effects. In the Nourishing Hope Food Pyramid, good fats are referred to as "Brain Foods."

Nourishing Hope Principles

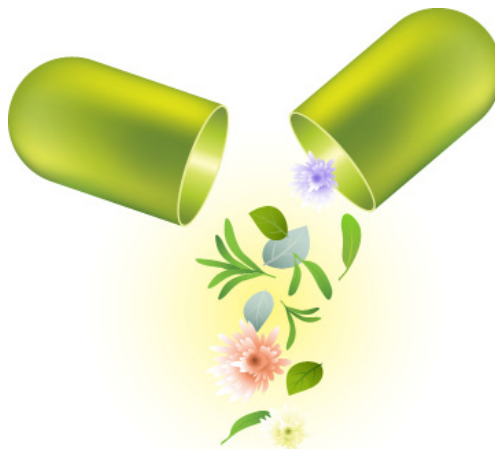
In the Food Pyramid, I include nine "Foundations," nutrition principles that make the foods most nutrient-rich and easier to digest. These include: grass-fed animal foods and organic produce, broths, fermentations, soaking and sprouting grains, etc.

I'll explain four of the principles here, you can learn more at my website NourishingHope.com.

Juicing - Juicing vegetables is a wonderful way to get concentrated nutrients. The nutrients are highly available and easy on digestion as they are already extracted from the pulp. This is a great solution for children that prefer drinking juice and may not like eating vegetables.

It's best to drink the juice immediately upon pressing—within 10 minutes. Don't over do it on sweet produce like carrots, beets, and fruits - use sweet vegetables and fruits mainly as a flavor accent. Try fennel, cucumber, and/or celery as a base with a couple green and colorful vegetables, and the sweeter ones as necessary.

Fermented foods contain live bacteria that are essential for good health. The most well known fermented food is yogurt. Good bacteria like lactobacillus acidophilus have dozens of positive biochemical functions. They create vitamins such as vitamin K and B-vitamins, crowd out bad pathogens making it inhospitable for them, and break down heavy metals, toxins, and spent hormones. Good bacteria aid peristalsis for preventing constipation and diarrhea, help reduce gas, and decrease inflammation.



Yogurt is most commonly made from dairy and not allowed on a casein-free diet. However, there are many other fermented foods that can be prepared. Parents can make their own homemade non-dairy yogurt with nut or coconut milk for example. In some cases, those that aren't casein-free may have a homemade dairy-based yogurt on SCD or GAPS Diet. You can add yogurt to smoothies or recipes. Additionally, kefir, a common dairy ferment, can be made with young coconut juice, a creative idea from the Body Ecology Diet. It is a fizzy, "soda-like" beverage, and can be mixed with fruit juice.

Raw sauerkraut is one of my favorites, and while many children won't eat store bought sauerkraut, you'd be surprised how many like a naturally fermented healthy variety (especially if they helped make it!). It's very sour and crunchy, so for children that like sour foods (lemons), they will love it. You want to find a brand that is raw and unpasteurized, or make it yourself. It's great tossed in a salad. You can use sauerkraut juice as salad dressings as well, or you can blend a little sauerkraut in the food processor with apple sauce. You only need a small bit of these powerful fermented foods throughout the day for them to be very effective in aiding digestion and boosting good bacteria levels.

Broths - Broths made from animal bones and vegetables are very rich in nutrients and available in absorbable forms. Bone broths like chicken broth contain natural gelatin that can aid digestion and healing. Adding vegetables can add even more minerals. You can add broths

to soups and stew. You can also cook grains, beans, and gluten-free pasta in broths. It is essential that all broths are homemade, as most store bought versions contain MSG and/or do not contain important nutrients.

Supplementation - It is best to strive to get as many nutrients from food as possible; however, supplementation may be necessary in certain situations.

For example, on a dairy-free diet, your child may need more calcium than he can get from diet alone depending on his eating habits. For a child that has weak digestion and can't break down foods well, digestive enzymes can be very supportive. For a family with a certain genetic variant like MTHFR, other biochemical conditions such as pyroluria, nutrients may be required in specific forms or in amounts larger than one can typically get from food, and may require supplementation.

Research indicates that supplementation improves the symptoms of autism. One very comprehensive study by Dr. Jim Adams¹² demonstrated improvements in language, play, cognition, sleep, hyperactivity, and more, using nutrient supplementation.

See *Nourishing Hope for Autism* for more on supplements and their uses.

You Can Do It - Even Picky Eaters!

By avoiding offensive foods and boosting up nutrition, children with autism, ADHD, and many other childhood conditions can improve through natural healing processes. While following a special diet can seem daunting at first, it will soon become routine. There is no more immediate impact a parent can have than taking charge of diet. The scientific and practical evidence for concerted focus on diet and nutrition is strong.

Avoid offending foods, and boost up nutrition step by step. I suggest getting support from a qualified and experienced practitioner to help you ensure good nutrition while following any special diet. As I've explained, each child ultimately requires a bioindividual approach, so any single "diet" must always be adjusted. That is why you should also reach out to other parents that are nourishing hope, supporting each other, and sharing nuances and tips.

Even picky eaters benefit. I have had some very picky eaters come in to my nutrition practice—many children ate only bread and dairy, others subsisted on just pancakes and fries. But there are solid reasons why these children are so one-sided in their food choices, primarily craving.

For example, one biochemical reason for picky eating is, when the body creates opiates from foods, one can become addicted to them and thus crave nothing but those foods.



Children eventually narrow their food choices to include only those that make them “feel better” in the moment, though are hurtful to their body and mind. Their “picky eating” consists of only a few foods: often wheat and dairy-based foods.

It’s common that once the child gets passed the cravings (several days to a few weeks), their food choices expand dramatically. Then it becomes much easier to evolve and sustain a specialized diet.

I know that any child’s diet can change. It may take time and require great patience, but you can succeed—increasingly so as the body heals. Envision positive changes for your child, and project good thoughts and feelings that do wonders for you child and the success of your overall efforts.

Following a special diet takes commitment and diligence. You can do it. The rewards will last a lifetime for children with autism and beyond.

In the next part of this **Get Started Guide**, I’ll share tips and support for Picky Eaters, and in the final part, I’ll give you a proven step-by-step method to making this work for you!

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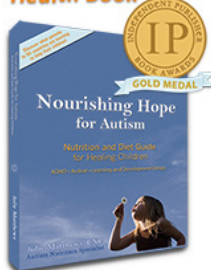
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Julie Matthews is an internationally respected Certified Nutrition Consultant specializing in autism spectrum disorders. She is an expert in applying food, nutrition, and diet to aid digestive health and systemic healing. Her guidance and support tools stem from extensive research and applied clinical experience. Julie supports parents of children with autism from around the world and collaborates with pediatricians, family doctors, and researchers. She educates at the leading biomedical autism conferences, writes for autism publications, and has a private nutrition practice San Francisco, California.

Most Progressive Health Book



NOURISHING HOPE FOR AUTISM

Diet and nutrition intervention guide for parents and professionals. Provides the scientific WHY and HOW various diets help children find relief from the symptoms of autism and ADHD. Contains step-by-step nutrition guide that stems from extensive clinical experience and research.



COOKING TO HEAL

Inspiring 4 hour LIVE nutrition and cooking class – with Special Diet Cookbook (diet compliant recipes.) Learn to follow any special diet; how to provide good nutrition, address food restrictions and sensitivities, and still create meals families (and picky eaters) will love.