

## Many learning and behavior problems begin in your grocery cart!



Did you know that the brand of ice cream, cookie, and potato chip you choose could affect your or your children's behavior and ability to learn? Scientific studies show that some chemicals added to food and some food allergies can affect learning, behavior, and health in children.

Cutting out those foods and chemicals is safe and cheap, so it is a reasonable first step to take before drug treatment for attention deficit disorder, or to add if drug treatment has already been begun.

### **We recommend stopping:**

- Artificial food coloring  
Examples include Yellow #5, Red 40, Blue #1
- Artificial flavoring
- Aspartame (NutraSweet, a sweetener)
- Preservatives BHA, BHT, TBHQ, benzoate
  - sometimes these are listed on the package as “anti-oxidants”
  - also watch out for MSG, nitrites, sulfites
- Fragrances and non-food items (shampoo, etc.) which contain these chemicals

The easiest way to avoid most of these things is to cook from scratch instead of using foods from boxes and cans.

### **Food Allergies**

For children who are not better after cutting out food additives, it may be worth trying an “few foods diet,” that is a diet with only a few foods. Multiple studies have shown this to be helpful. Kids start with a very limited diet: two types of meats (lamb, turkey), two starch sources (rice, potatoes), two types of vegetables (cabbage, carrots), and two fruits (apple, banana). Other than this, only salt, water, apple juice and mineral oil are allowed. This only needs to be tried for a week or two. If your child starts behaving better on a diet like this, you can slowly add back other foods to figure out which one your child is sensitive to. This could be almost anything. For some kids it is milk, for others wheat, and for many there is more than one food. Talk to your provider about other strategies for an elimination diet.

### **Environmental Exposures**

Other chemicals can also be associated with ADHD, including phthalates and BPA (from plastic products), pesticides, PFC's (from nonstick pans) and even the exhaust from gas appliances. Talk to your provider or check out [healthychild.org](http://healthychild.org) to learn more about keeping your child safe.

### **Some supplements and natural products for help with Attention Deficit Disorder:**

#### **Iron**

Iron helps ADHD symptoms in children with low iron (including children who were not anemic.) Ask your provider for a ferritin test.

#### **Omega-3 fats**

Fish oil has been shown to help children with ADHD. The dose should be 500 – 600 mg EPA and 175 mg DHA for at least 6 months.

#### **Zinc**

Zinc sulfate 55 mg/day can help. If using this long-term, give a multivitamin with copper as well.

#### **Pycnogenol**

Pycnogenol may also help symptoms. The dose studied was 1 mg per kg of body weight (i.e. 30 mg for a 70-lb child.) Grape seed extract is a cheaper source.