COUNSELOR'S CORNER

Fuel for Focus & Feelings

OCTOBER 2026 | A FAMILY GUIDE TO NUTRITION, MOOD, AND LEARNING

What children eat can influence how they feel and function. Food is not a cure-all, and every child is different. Still, regular meals, a variety of nutrient-rich foods, enough water, and healthy routines can help support steady energy, attention, and overall well-being.

Start with a balanced plate

Children's brains and bodies need a steady supply of energy and nutrients to learn, play, and manage big feelings. Instead of focusing on one "superfood," aim for variety across the day. Pairing protein and fiber-rich carbohydrates can make meals and snacks more satisfying and may help children avoid feeling hungry or running out of energy before the next meal.

- Protein: eggs, yogurt, cheese, beans, lentils, fish, chicken, nuts or nut butters (when safe for your child).
- Whole grains and fiber: oatmeal, whole-grain toast, brown rice, whole-grain cereal, beans, fruits, and vegetables.
- Healthy fats: salmon and other oily fish, walnuts, chia seeds, ground flaxseed, and suitable plant oils.
- Hydration: offer water regularly. Even small daily habits—like keeping a water bottle handy—can make healthy routines easier.

Breakfast that helps kids get going

A rushed morning does not have to mean skipping breakfast or relying on a sweet snack alone. Try combining a food your child already likes with a source of protein or fiber. Keep expectations realistic: a small breakfast at home and a packed snack for later may work better for some families.

- Oatmeal topped with berries, banana, or nut/seed butter.
- Eggs with whole-grain toast and fruit.
- Plain or low-sugar yogurt with fruit and oats or whole-grain cereal.
- Whole-grain toast with peanut or sunflower-seed butter, if appropriate.
- A smoothie made with yogurt or milk/fortified alternative, fruit, and oats.

Read more: Best Breakfast for Kids: The Benefits Are Real — and Delicious | Breakfast for Learning: Why the Morning Meal Matters

Supplements: helpful in some cases, not a shortcut

Vitamins, minerals, and omega-3 fatty acids are important for health, but taking extra supplements does not automatically improve focus or emotional regulation. A supplement may be useful when a child has a diagnosed deficiency, has dietary restrictions, or has another specific need identified by a healthcare professional. Evidence for using supplements to improve attention or mood in otherwise healthy children is mixed.

- Omega-3s (including EPA and DHA) are found in oily fish such as salmon. Ask your child's healthcare professional whether a supplement is appropriate.
- Iron, vitamin D, zinc, magnesium, and B vitamins each have important roles in the body. More is not always better; supplements are not interchangeable, and high doses can be harmful.
- Check labels and avoid combining products without advice. Supplements can interact with medicines, and "natural" does not always mean safe.
- Keep all vitamins and supplements securely out of children's reach. Iron overdose can be especially dangerous for young children.

Explore these articles:

- 10 Supplements and Vitamins for Brain Health
- What's the Right Fish Oil Dosage for My Child?

- The ADHD Diet Plan: Healthy Foods and Supplements for Kids & Adults
- Top 5 Supplements for ADHD: A Guide for Children and Adults

Small routines can make a big difference

Nutrition works best as one part of a bigger picture. Predictable routines, sleep, movement, encouragement, and breaking tasks into manageable steps can all help children feel more prepared to learn and respond to challenges.

- ADHD Behavior Strategies: 7 Powerful Tips
- The American Academy of Pediatrics' nutrition resources

A note for families

Please talk with your child's pediatrician before starting a vitamin, mineral, fish-oil product, or other supplement. A clinician can help determine whether a supplement is needed, check for possible deficiencies, review medication interactions, and recommend an age-appropriate product and dose. Do not stop or change prescribed treatment based on an online article.

Trusted supplement guidance: National Institutes of Health: Dietary Supplement FAQs