

Children and the Brain: Think Big!

Nourishing Tips to Nurture New Neurons

BY LAUREN ZIMET



The brain. We all have one. Yet sometimes it gets neglected.

Our brain needs certain things to stay healthy, and when it doesn't get what it needs, it doesn't work its best. In fact, sometimes it gets the opposite of what it needs—stuff it doesn't know what to do with, such as artificial dyes, preservatives, GMOs, the list goes on. When this happens, both our brain and body can have a sensitive reaction that can look different from one person to the next, but that can result in a brain not performing to its highest standard.

We are born with 100 billion brain cells, and the brain continues to develop after a baby is born. New connections between neurons—the cells in the brain—form quickly from birth to 3 years of age and older, and continue to form throughout our lives, based on our experiences.

This means that we need to nourish our brain. We need to give it both the experiences and the nutrients it needs to develop. It helps children to know that with each healthy food they eat, and with each new experience they have, they are making a new connection in their brain. This is powerful stuff. Imagine a child, face filled with pride, after making a new neural connection by simply taking a nibble of kale.

The following seven tips offer simple ways you can guide your

children in making mindful, brain-healthy choices as they play, learn, work, and grow.

1. Eat a rainbow. Eat a colorful array of organic fruits and vegetables every day. Be sure to wash the produce to loosen and rinse away any dirt and toxins. Kids can do the washing—they benefit from being part of a team, by having their own chores within the family.

2. Don't eat fake stuff. The body really likes food. Real food, such as whole grains, protein, lots of colorful vegetables and fruit, and healthy fats. Limit or eliminate artificial dyes, colors, and flavors; processed foods; fast foods; junk foods; hydrogenated fats; sodas; and refined sugars.

3. Keep your brain lubed. Your brain needs omega-3s, also known as essential fatty acids (EFAs), for proper growth, particularly for neural development and maturation of sensory systems. EFAs speed neural signals along, making for smoother, easier, more efficient communication across synapses. EFAs are necessary for proper immune function, cognitive development, and for skin function and maintenance. A deficit in EFAs has been linked to ADHD, dyslexia, and other behavioral and psychological disorders. Your body can't make EFAs, so you need to consume them. They are found in nuts, seeds, olives, seaweed, and fish. It's always best to

eat foods that contain vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients, but if you are unsure that your child is getting a well-balanced diet, a purified, molecularly distilled fish oil supplement is a great EFA source. My trusted brand of choice is Nordic Naturals.

4. Stay awash in oxygen and water. Drink H₂O to hydrate—check with your health care practitioner for how much, but a quick rule is to divide your body weight by two to get the approximate number of ounces to drink per day. Also, take slow, deep breaths to reset and calm the sensory and neurological system. Deep breathing helps children self-regulate and improves immunity, nervous system functioning, and emotional regulation. A recent study published in the *International Journal of Nursing Studies* reports that deep breathing is effective for reducing anxiety in children with asthma.

5. Learn to move and to chill. The brain loves exercise, and exercise boosts brain power. But you also need to teach your child how to relax—for example, by getting out into nature, reading an entertaining book, or playing a board game. Long-term stress can be toxic, and a stressed brain doesn't learn the same way as an unstressed brain. Emotional stress has an impact on a child's ability to learn. Sustained stress can damage a developing brain's architecture, which can lead to problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.

6. Rewire your thinking. Create “Band-Aid thoughts” as a tool to acknowledge and work through bad, sad, mad, frustrated, and negative thoughts. Demonstrating positive self-talk

Lauren's favorite resources

NordicNaturals.com
ChickinFeed.com
KellyDorfman.com
JuliaTurnerNutrition.com
ImpactADHD.com
BrainInsightsOnline.com
BucketFilling101.com
TodayLateARainbow.com
BrainRules.net

▶ Five questions to ask for a thumbs-up fish oil

1. Has the fish oil been purified? Purity is everything when it comes to fish oil, because unpurified fish oil can contain unsafe levels of toxins and contaminants such as dioxins, PCBs, mercury, arsenic, and lead. Look for fish oil that has gone through molecular distillation and has been shown through testing not to exceed the established limits for toxins.

2. How was it prepared? For the freshest fish oil, make sure it's been processed and purified in a low-heat nitrogen environment without oxygen. Oxygen can cause fish oil to become rancid.

3. Is it easily absorbed? Fish oil that is in the natural triglyceride form, also known as TG, rather than the ethyl ester form, sometimes called EE, is your best bet. Research shows that the TG form of fish oil is more easily absorbed.

4. What does it taste like? A good fish oil will taste fresh and pure. Pour a tiny bit onto a spoon or bite into the capsule. If the fish oil tastes bad, or fishy, it's not the best choice for your child.

5. Is it third-party tested? A fish oil company's claims aren't credible unless a qualified, independent organization has tested and confirmed the claims. The International Fish Oil Standards are based on organizations that have established acceptable quality standards, including the Council for Responsible Nutrition and the World Health Organization.

in front of your children—for example, reflecting on how you expertly handled a difficult or challenging situation—lays a blueprint for how they may handle their own problems. Negative thoughts or mistakes can be opportunities to learn and grow from.

7. Name that feeling. Teaching your child to label emotions and recognize feelings helps connect the nonverbal and verbal pathways in the brain. Strengthening these pathways can improve a child's ability to take on another's perspective. This is especially useful for children with learning challenges, who need more support developing flexible thinking. 🐾

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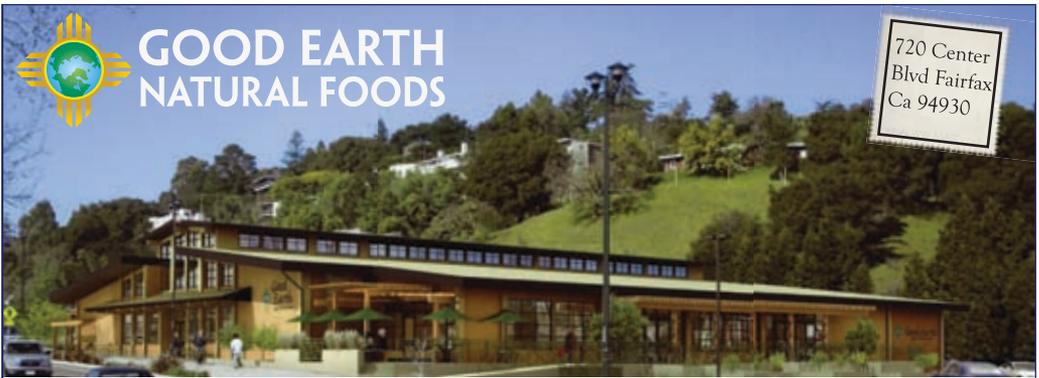
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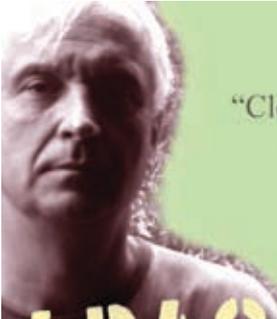


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