

## **Brain Boosters**

Want your kids to score straight A's on their report card? Then get them eating brain food! Studies are finding that certain foods can actually give brains a boost. Some foods contain nutrients that are used to make certain brain chemicals that may help your child concentrate, stay motivated, and improve their memory. Help your kids get the best grades you can be proud of by providing them with the right foods. Here are some of those brain boosters:

### **B Vitamins**

Inadequate intake of any B vitamin (B1, B2, B6, B12 and folic acid) can starve your child's brain for energy leading to confusion, irritability, inability to concentrate, and reduced memory. To boost your child's brain with Bs, include several daily servings of vitamin B-rich foods like green peas, strawberries and bananas. Other great sources include whole grains, seafood and nonfat milk and yogurt.

### **Iron**

Studies show that iron deficiency anemia is a risk factor for poor school performance in children. Iron is needed to carry oxygen to the brain cells and it's used to make brain neurotransmitters, especially the ones that regulate the ability to pay attention, which is crucial to learning. Iron deficiency causes poor attention span and affects learning ability. Food sources rich in iron include dark leafy greens, dried apricots, broccoli, cooked dried beans and peas, and extra-lean red meat.

Cooking in cast-iron pots also helps as iron leaches out of the pot and into the food, raising the iron content of the food you are cooking. Another helpful hint is having your kids drink a vitamin C-rich orange juice with iron-rich meals to boost iron absorption.

### **Antioxidants**

Products of normal metabolism known as free radicals can injure brain cells. Antioxidants, like vitamin C and E, found in fruits, vegetables, oils, margarine and nuts neutralize free radicals before they can harm cells. To keep your child's antioxidant defenses strong getting them eating at least five servings of vegetables and fruit a day, examples of good sources are orange juice, strawberries, carrots, spinach, cantaloupe and other dark-colored fresh fruits and vegetables. Keep in mind children's serving sizes are smaller than those for adults.

Studies show that breakfast is a definite brain food. Children who fuel up in the morning do better in the classroom, perform well on tests, and are more likely to remember what they learned in school. A healthy start would be a fortified breakfast cereal with non-fat milk and berries.

To avoid your child from getting sluggish or fatigued, ensure he or she eats throughout the day. Send your kids off to school with healthful morning and afternoon snacks for recess – precut vegetables and fruit are easy! Proper nutrition, physical activity and great study habits will put your kids on the path to stellar marks.

And if you are not quite ready to send your child off to school, a great way to get a head start is to breastfeed your baby. A study concluded that adults who had been breastfed for seven to nine months as infants had higher IQs than those who had been breastfed for less than one month. It's never too early to start boosting your child brain power!

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