

Six Powerhouse Foods for Kids

With Palate-Pleasing Tips

by Susan Enfield Esrey

As parents, feeding children nourishing foods is one of our most important jobs. Although most new moms and dads start with impeccable intentions (homemade baby food, anyone?), maintaining high family standards can be a challenge when many easygoing babies become toddlers and school-age kids are picky about what's on their plate.

It's unfortunate, because the stakes are high. According to the American Heart Association, about one in three American kids and teens today is overweight or obese, and thus at greater risk for Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. A recent Australian study by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, in Perth, also has linked the "Western diet"—high in processed sugars, fats and starches, meats and salt, and low in fresh fruits and vegetables—to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in adolescents.

"When we looked at specific foods, having an ADHD diagnosis was associated with a diet high in takeaway foods, processed meats, red meat, high-fat dairy products and confectionary," adds Professor Wendy Oddy, Ph.D., the

nutritional epidemiologist who led the study. She notes that more research is needed to determine the specific nature of the relationship.

The good news is that it's never too late to introduce healthy foods to a child. Here are six nutritional powerhouses children might actually eat.

Avocado: Loaded with healthy monounsaturated fats, potassium and folate, creamy avocados are a natural early-childhood favorite, says Pediatrician Dr. Robert Sears, author of *HappyBaby: The Organic Guide to Baby's First 24 Months*.

How to eat: Spoon it out straight from the rind. Mash into guacamole with garlic and cilantro if desired. Use the spread (instead of butter or mayo) on whole-grain toast or a sandwich. Or, blend avocado's goodness with cocoa powder, agave nectar, vanilla and water for an irresistible dip for fruit.

Berries: Antioxidants in blueberries, raspberries and blackberries are well-known aids in helping to prevent illness and improve brain function, says Sears. Choose organically grown berries to avoid pesticide residues. Nutritionally, frozen berries are just as good as fresh, although fresh tastes best. Also try



antioxidant-rich açaí berries (in powder form or frozen smoothie packs) and dried goji berries.

How to eat: Eat berries plain or add them to cereal or oatmeal; leave them whole or purée to pour over whole-grain waffles. Blend any type of berry with yogurt and bananas for a deliciously healthy smoothie.

Chia seeds: Relatively new to the U.S. market, this South American grain (the most researched variety is Salba seeds) may be the world's healthiest, says Sears. He notes that it's gluten-free; provides more omega-3 fatty acids than any other plant food; contains six times more calcium than milk; and is a rich source of vitamin C, protein, fiber, magnesium and iron. Other options include hemp and flax seeds.

How to eat: Sprinkle chia, hemp seed or ground flaxseed onto cereal, salad greens or brown rice. Add chia to juice to make a *chia fresca*. Spread nutty-tasting hemp seed onto natural nut butter sandwiches on whole-grain bread or crackers.

Quinoa and amaranth: Nutritionally, these grains—traditional foods in South America and Africa, respectively—trump typical North American grains by far. Both are gluten-free and contain more protein and calcium than wheat, oats, rice or rye.

How to eat: Triple-wash quinoa, vigorously rubbing grains to remove the bitter outside coating—then cook either quinoa or amaranth like rice for 20 minutes. Cook in heated water, then stir in applesauce and cinnamon and serve as a cereal; or cook in broth and then stir in chopped, fresh herbs.

Wild salmon: "Wild salmon is perhaps the healthiest fish source of omega-3 fats and protein, the two most important nutrients that kids need to grow," advises Sears. Choose wild-caught salmon (fresh or frozen) over farmed fish to avoid possible contaminants.

How to eat: Glaze roasted fillets with orange juice and teriyaki sauce, or a mix of maple syrup, grated ginger and rice vinegar. Make a salmon and goat cheese (or Neufchâtel) tortilla wrap; then cut into spirals and serve.

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