

## **Children's Diets...the ingredient they can do without!**

### **Understanding the Positives and Negatives of the Foods our Children Eat**

Parents can ask nowadays how should I feed my child or children as they return to school. Is it helpful to feed them vitamins or health foods? Is soda alright? What if they seem to want only junk food? Does eating have any effect on their ability to concentrate at school? All of these are legitimate questions. To answer such questions we first have to look at childrens' diets as a whole. **Diet can be either positive or negative. Nutrition is the study of what we need to take in for all the body processes to work.** These nutrients are protein and calories, essential fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals. To utilize carbohydrate, we need the B vitamins including thiamine, riboflavin and niacin. To utilize protein we need the vitamin B-6 or pyridoxal phosphate. Fortunately, nature packages foods with the nutrients needed for their utilization (or metabolism). For example, whole wheat which contains carbohydrates also contains the B vitamins which are needed to utilize the carbohydrate. Protein containing foods, such as meat, contain the B vitamin B-6 which is needed to utilize the protein.

Diet also includes negative things. These include cancer causing chemicals and any other poisons or other active chemicals which find their way into food. Caffeine would be such an example. Caffeine is not a nutrient but it is a very active part of food if it is present. These kinds of chemicals are not really part of nutrition but the negative parts of diet are very important in understanding how to feed children to help them do their best in school.

### **When Vitamin Supplements are Needed to Balance a Child's Diet (it's less than you think!)**

Children who are eating whole foods such as whole wheat, whole grains, vegetables and fruits, do not need vitamin pills. The nutrients needed to utilize these foods are contained in these foods. The problem is that children often eat foods which have been separated into parts so that the nutrients are no longer all present.

When wheat is milled into flour, the wheat germ is separated from the starchy part of the wheat, which then becomes white flour. The white starchy part has very few nutrients. The vitamins and minerals are all in the wheat germ. Whole wheat contains both. In the earlier 1900's, many people became ill with vitamin deficiency diseases. The government then said that certain nutrients had to be added to the white flour so that these deficiencies would not occur. Some vitamins and iron are added in "enriching" the white flour.

Even if children eat foods mostly based on white flour, they will still receive some vitamins. Vitamin and mineral supplements can make up for some of the rest of what is not added back in the "enrichment" process.

But there are still problems. The fiber or bran of the wheat is also removed. Fiber draws water into the gut as we digest food. The extra fluid makes us feel fuller and less likely to overeat. Fiber in food helps us regulate our caloric intake. People eat less calories when fiber is present in food.

Also when nutrients are missing from a food, we tend to eat more because we are looking for the missing nutrients. We keep on hoping that the nutrient will be in the next bite. If all the nutrients are present, then we will be satisfied sooner and eat less.

**Part of the reason people overeat junk food and soda is that nutrients are not there, so the child overeats looking for the nutrients to be present in the next bite.**

### **How to Reduce a Child's Overeating**

**So if you are concerned about a child overeating, the best thing to do is make sure the child eats fiber at every meal and eats whole grains.** Whole wheat and whole grains are preferable because they contain all the nutrients, vitamins and minerals and fiber. Unfortunately, a vitamin pill in the morning does not help with the tendency to overeat junk food lacking in nutrients later in the day.

## **The Negative Effects of Malt (one of the prevalent ingredients in children's food)**

Does what the child eats affect the ability to concentrate? Studies on sugar in the diet have been done. In general, giving sugar in the diet versus a non-sugar sweetener does not have much effect on ability to concentrate. When such studies are done, only one thing can be changed at a time. Basically the diet is left alone except for a part of the diet which is sugar and then a non-sugar containing substitute. Whether the rest of the diet contains whole grains and/or much fiber might not be important to researchers doing such studies.

But let me explain something else about diet and the ability to concentrate. There is another food ingredient present in almost all children's diets and that is malt. Malt goes by a number of names, including barley malt, malt syrup, malt extract, or simply malt. Maltodextrin is malt mixed with either corn starch or potato starch. Malt is a sprouted barley which is then heat killed and forms the raw material for making beer. Malt is mixed with yeast to make beer. Malt is also sweet and is sold as a sugar substitute. Because malt is prepared at high temperatures, the protein and carbohydrate combine in some strange chemical ways which do not normally occur in nature. The resulting chemicals have major effects which are more similar to drugs than to food. **In the process of making malt, twenty chemicals are formed which are sedating to the brain. That is, these chemicals slow down the brain and put it to sleep.** In toxicology studies, these chemicals are compared to phenobarbital, a chemical used to put people to sleep. The strongest one is 1/13 as strong as phenobarbital except that in malt, these chemicals are present in food type quantities, not the milligrams used in drugs.

Malt is added or baked into nearly everything, from breads and bagels, cookies and crackers to children's breakfast cereals. Millions of children every day are going to school after eating food containing twenty chemicals which are putting their brains to sleep. Then they can't concentrate and need drugs to stimulate them to concentrate. Malt also contains chemicals which cause headaches.

If you want your child to concentrate better at school, don't feed him or her malt or any food containing malt in the morning. They'll do better at school without malt. To do this, you have to read all food labels. You will be amazed at all the foods which contain malt. But your child will do better without malt.

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