

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Food and Your Child's Emotional Health

If you've ever witnessed a hungry child in the throws of a temper tantrum, you probably don't need scientific evidence to know that food or lack thereof—can have a huge impact on a child's mood.

In days past, mealtimes brought the family together but today between pre-processed snack packs, dinners in a box and the myriad of drive-throughs, meals are, for many, an afterthought hastily picked up after a rushed and stressful day of work.

Consider trying the following to boost your child's ability to maintain an even temper:

Think outside the box. Fast and processed foods should be an occasional indulgence rather than daily fare. Even "healthy" processed options are usually loaded with unnecessary salt, sugars and preservatives. Invest in timesaving cookbooks that can help you plan a weekly menu and prepare fast, well-balanced meals.

Schedule wholesome snacks. Avoid crankiness and keep energy levels up with healthy scheduled snacks. Fruit, nuts, seeds and sliced veggies are all great ways to keep your child's body and brain steady throughout the day.

Treat tantrums with water. Children often don't realize they're dehydrated. Ensure children are drinking water throughout the day, extra if they're spending time in the sun or running around outside.

Omega 3. Remember that daily dose of cod liver oil? The old wives were on to something. It's packed full of Omega-3 fatty acids. Cold-water fish such as salmon, tuna and mackerel are some of the best sources of Omega-3, as are flaxseed oil and Omega-3 enriched eggs. Omega 3 can aid in the prevention and treatment of mental conditions including ADD, depression and bi-polar disorders as they are thought to boost brain connections and build brain cells.

Stop the pop. Beyond the obvious dental and calorie concerns, pop spikes blood sugar levels making kids feel giddy one minute, low and lethargic the next. It also means many children aren't consuming the calcium and vitamins they'd get from more nutritious drinks. Serve milk, water and watered down pure fruit juice (as even pure juice is high in sugar) to keep kids healthy and hydrated.

Make healthy food fun. Get kids of all ages involved in preparing meals. Whether it's washing veggies or providing older kids with the tools to explore their culinary creativity. Try some of the fun and healthy cookbooks currently on the shelves about cooking for and with kids.

Don't resort to force. Forcing a child to clean their plate against their will can interfere with their ability to gauge when they're full, setting up a pattern that can cause weight issues down the road. If you are worried your child isn't getting enough nutrients, you should consult your doctor.

Comfort with support, not food. Many people learn early to heal feelings of pain or sadness with food. This may be a quick fix to helping your child feel better, but can set up a pattern of emotional binging. Keep the sweets under wraps and talk to your child about how they're feeling. Encourage them to work through tough times with the help of exercise, play, creative expression and communication rather than snacks.

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Get help. If you feel overwhelmed by the sea of food news out there, it might be time to consult your child's doctor or a dietician for support. A professional can help you put your child and your family on a path to healthy eating.

The time-crunch of today's fast-paced world means it's harder for kids to actually get the support of solid sustenance to nourish their physical and emotional development. Fortunately though, a little planning and nutritional knowledge can go a long way in feeding your family the nutritious nosh they need to remain healthy, happy and well balanced.