Food for the Growing Brain
Growing brains need the right fuel to see them through the day. In order to keep your child’s brain fuelled – it helps to know the **5 most important nutritional sources** that the brain relies upon.

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<th>Nutritional Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| **Carbohydrates** | Sugar is your brain’s super fuel. In our diet it is available in 2 forms, *simple* and *complex* carbohydrates.  
*Complex carbohydrates* are gradually converted into sugar by the body. In this form, a more sustained release of sugar is supplied to your brain, minimising sugar highs and sugar crashes. Adding protein to your complex carbohydrates ensures that your child feels full for longer and is able to better sustain concentration *(see healthy, balanced snack options below)*  
**Sources:** whole grain products – rolled oats, brown rice, rice and corn cakes, whole grain sourdough breads, nuts and seeds, fruits and vegetables, legumes.  
By contrast, *simple carbohydrates* are quickly converted into sugar by your body, increasing blood sugar levels. They are found in processed foods like white bread, biscuits, white rice, pasta, crackers, cake, chocolate, lollies etc. These should be avoided and eaten seldom.  
If your child’s lunchbox contains simple carbohydrates they are more likely to experience difficulty concentrating, symptoms of hyperactivity, headaches, drowsiness and irritability.  
Keep blood sugar levels stable by ensuring that your child’s snacks and lunches contain complex carbohydrates, proteins and fats. |
| **Fats – essential fats or “good fats”** | 60% of your brain is made of fat. Your brain cells use this fat as insulation to promote proper delivery of messages within the brain and around the body.  
A deficiency in essential fats can lead to difficulty learning, a reduction in attention span and mood/behavioural disorders. We call these fats “essential” because your body requires a daily dose of them from the diet.  
**Sources:** nuts and seeds, olive oil, avocado oily fish – sardines, salmon, mackerel, fresh tuna, herring. |
| **Protein** | Protein rich foods provide the building blocks responsible for producing brain hormones (neurotransmitters) These essential hormones help to regulate your child’s behaviour, mood, appetite and sleep patterns.  
**Sources:** fish, chicken, lamb, beef, kangaroo, turkey, game meats, nuts and seeds, eggs, legumes, dairy foods, soy products. |
| **Vitamins & Minerals** | Required to maintain balance in the brain and ensure optimal performance. Aim to include 1-2 vegies and 1 piece of fruit in your child’s lunchbox – this will help you to reach the *daily requirement of 5 vegies and 2 fruits daily*.  
**Sources:** fruits and vegies and all whole (unprocessed) foods – grains, meats, dairy, legumes, nuts and seeds. The key here is *variety*. |
| **Water** | Please ensure that your child takes a bottle of water to school and is encouraged to drink water regularly. Each brain cell stores a reserve of water. It uses this reserve to maintain the tone of the membranes within the brain, enhance circulation of nutrients and removal of wastes. Water also prevents the brain from overheating which may result in reduced cognition. |
Avoid all foods that will detract from your child’s energy and brain health:

- Refined sugars (simple carbohydrates listed above)
- Damaged fats (fried foods and hydrogenated fats/oils in products, trans fats)
- Food additives (colours, flavourings, additives, preservatives)

Some healthy, balanced snack options:

- Rice/ corn thins, mountain bread wrap, pita bread, wholegrain sourdough bread plus one of the following fillings:
  - Hommus, tzatziki, eggplant dip
  - Tahina and honey
  - Egg and salad
  - Tuna and avocado
  - Ham and cheese
- Chicken and avocado (ensure that chicken is refrigerated appropriately with a freezer brick)
- Omelette/ frittata with cheese and veggies
- Lentil/ fish/ vegie patties or fritters
- Roasted chickpeas/ broad beans, seeds (sunflower, pumpkin) plus organic dried fruit or a piece of fresh fruit
- Yoghurt (Jalna/ Five AM) plus a piece of fresh fruit
- Vegies sticks (carrot, cucumber, celery, zucchini, capsicum, mushroom) with hommus, tzatziki, eggplant dip
- Popcorn with seeds or yoghurt
- Hardboiled egg with vegie sticks
- Tuna & bean or corn & bean salad
- Smoothie – fruit and yoghurt (ensure appropriately refrigerated)

Healthy food options do require preparation and therefore take time. As a working parent I understand how demanding life can be – sometimes you simply don’t have the time and you need fallback options! If you would like a list of healthy snacks that you can buy from the supermarket, email me josie@vitanaturalhealth.com.au and I can include them in the next edition of the newsletter. For more information on meal ideas and general health feel free to visit my website vitanaturalhealth.com.au