



## Brain Boosters



Food nourishes both your child's body and your child's mind. In the early years, the brain has some unique nutritional needs.

Although brain growth is well advanced by birth, your child's brain continues to grow and develop long after. There are literally billions of brain cell connections or synapses that are still developing well into childhood. These brain cells have specific nutritional needs and missing out on a particular nutrient at the time when a part of the brain is growing can cause problems.

A child's nourishment during the first years of life can affect the ability to learn, communicate, socialize and adapt to new environments and people. Making sure your child gets those particular nutrients needed during the first years of life will help to ensure the brain grows and develops optimally. Breast milk and formula are nutritionally complete and do not need to be supplemented for the first four to six months. Consult with your pediatrician as to the appropriate time for your baby to start solids. Then you will want to pay attention to make sure your child gets a good source of the 'brain' nutrients listed below.



- **Protein:** Protein is crucial for the growth of brain cells during development. A young child needs about 11 grams of protein per day. Protein is most concentrated in animal products like meat, milk, and eggs. Concentrated vegetable sources of protein include soy, legumes, nuts and seeds.

- **Fats:** The brain is 70% fat. Some fats are essential for proper brain function. Fats especially important to the brain are the omega-3 fatty acids. Food rich in these fats include cold-water fatty fish such as salmon, herring and sardines. Flax seed oil also contains significant amounts of essential fatty acids. Flax seed oil is destroyed by heat, so use it fresh. Add to salads, cooked vegetables or stir into cereal.



- **Iron:** Iron is critical for brain and nervous system development. Iron deficiency anemia in early life is related to altered behavioral and neural development. It is an important component of red blood cells that are responsible for carrying oxygen to the brain. Iron is the mineral most often deficient in the diet of older babies and toddlers. In general, your child should eat at least two iron rich foods each day. [Fortified infant cereal](#) is the best source of iron for babies and can be continued well into the

toddler years. If your child enjoys infant cereals, do not rush to wean him from them, instead, make it more appealing by making it thicker or adding ingredients such as fresh bananas, raisins or a little brown sugar or honey. Toddlers and preschoolers can also get an excellent source of iron from [Earth's Best Sesame Street cereals](#). Foods which are naturally high in iron include dark meat like beef, pork, lamb and dark meat poultry, dark leafy greens such as spinach, collard greens, parsley and watercress, raisins, dried apricots and egg yolks.

- **Vitamin A:** Vitamin A is necessary for vision. While not technically part of the brain, it is considered part of the nervous system. Vision, especially night vision depends on proper amounts of vitamin A. Excellent sources of vitamin A include sweet potatoes, winter squash, carrots, apricots, spinach, and fortified dairy products.
- **B vitamins:** B vitamins are found in many different foods, including grains, meats, dried beans, and fortified cereals and snacks. These vitamins play numerous roles from supporting proper vision, unlocking the energy in carbohydrates, and supporting the protective myelin sheath around brain cells.



Many other nutrients play a supporting role in brain and neural development. For this reason, a diet with a wide variety of food is necessary for children.

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