

Foods to help kids FOCUS in school



As you pack your child's lunch, remember to send them to school with foods that will help them F.O.C.U.S.!

F: Fiber and whole grains both help slow down the speed at which sugar enters the bloodstream. So

when kids eat fiber and whole grains as part of a healthy snack and/or lunch, they are less likely to experience a spike in blood sugar levels, and this helps them avoid a "crash" in energy later on. More stable energy levels equal better potential for focus.

Some kid-friendly foods filled with fiber and/or whole grains include plain popcorn, beans, avocado, hummus, almonds, bananas, whole wheat pasta, quinoa, brown rice, edamame,

whole wheat bread (different than "multi-grain", which is not whole grain), fruit with skin (like pears and apples), berries (especially blackberries), and oatmeal-based products (but watch out for the added sugar in things like oatmeal cookies that will cause that crash later on!)



O: Omega-3 fatty acids contribute to brain function and cognitive behavior and can

be found in kid-friendly foods such as avocado, tuna, tilapia fish sticks, salmon, extra virgin olive oil, almonds, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, and macadamia nuts.

C: Crunchy and chewy foods are one of the best kept secrets when it comes to foods that help kids focus. Though it's common knowledge among pediatric occupational therapists, not a lot of people know about it for some reason. Foods that are crunchy or chewy can provide a lot of "heavy" input to the jaw because the muscles really have to work to break them down, and this particular type of sensory input helps increase focus and attention. Foods like hard crackers, pretzels/pretzel rods, peanut butter (watch out for nut allergies, of course), cheese, nuts, granola bars, corn nuts, carrots, celery, broccoli, sliced bell peppers, snap peas, apples, fruit leather, or dry cereal (granola is nice and crunchy).



U: Giving kids unprocessed foods will help reduce the amount of trans fats and high fructose corn syrup they eat during the day, which means they will be more likely to eat fresh foods that will keep their energy at a balanced level and help them maintain their focus. Remember, "processed foods" are foods that have been altered from their original state, and they are EVERYWHERE. They often contain ingredients such as white flour, added sugar, added salt, partially hydrogenated oils (the trans fats), and high fructose corn syrup. Think of it this way: if a food can

sit on a shelf for weeks or months on end without going bad, then it's most likely processed.

S: Food and drinks that require sucking can really help kids get focused and increase their attention. This is another trick pediatric occupational therapists keep in their back pocket that not too many people know about. Sucking through a straw or straw-like container can be a very "focusing" activity, so if you send kids to school with a pop-top water bottle or straw for their milk (how about a fun crazy straw?), you will be setting them up for school success!

BONUS FOOD: Protein. Protein contributes to stable energy levels (which contributes to focus and attention), so be sure to include kid-friendly protein in your child's lunch with foods like hard boiled eggs, beans, nuts (again, be vigilant about avoiding nut allergies), quinoa, meat (the less processed the better), hummus, cheese, milk, yogurt (easy on the sugar!), or avocado/guacamole.

When you pack your child's lunch in the morning (or the night before, if you're really ambitious), do a quick scan of their lunchbox and ask yourself:

Am I helping my child F.O.C.U.S.? 🍓

