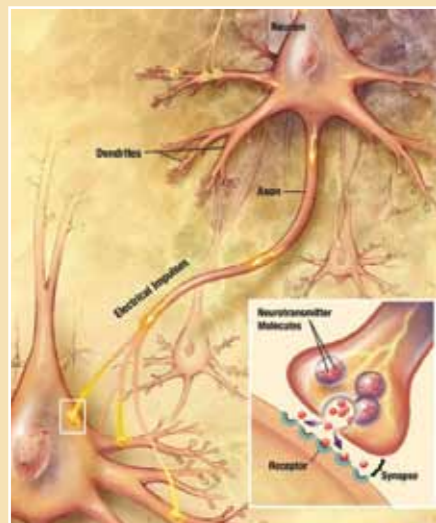


You are the architect of your child's brain

Part 2 – From theory to practice BY DVORI BLUMENAU



BRAIN FOOD THE THEORY

As mentioned in part 1 of this article, in order for a message to pass from neuron (brain cell) to neuron, sending and receiving stations to each neuron (as illustrated in the picture) are employed. These stations are made of essential fats and amino acids (the building blocks of protein). The message itself that “fires” between the sending and receiving stations is comprised of chemicals, known as ‘neurotransmitters’, which are made-up of amino acids. The catalysts for turning amino acids into neurotransmitters are enzymes that depend on vitamins and minerals. Therefore, what our children eat not only builds their bodies, but affects the structure and functioning of their brains, namely, their thoughts, feelings and behaviour. A child’s mental health is directly impacted by what nourishes the child’s neurons. Hence, “you are the architect of your child’s brain”.

IN ORDER FOR US TO KNOW how to nourish our child’s brain, we need to understand which foods contain essential fats, amino acids, vitamins and minerals.

Essential fats: sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, hempseed, sesame seeds, corn, nuts, avocado, salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines, anchovies (unsalted), tuna, eggs, cold press olive oil, grape-seed oil, coconut oil, olives, dark green leafy vegetables, milk, chicken, meat and others.

85% of the nutrition in foods is destroyed through cooking. Fresh, raw foods contain the highest level of enzymes. Enzymes are the catalysts for the hundreds of thousands of chemical reactions that occur throughout the body, including the brain. Raw food also stabilises blood sugar levels, which are so important for mood stability and concentration.

While the food that G-d gave us in its pure form is vital and energising, man-made processed food often does the opposite.

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Good sources of protein: quinoa, fish, chicken, meat, eggs, yoghurt (natural), cheese, brown rice, lentils, beans, nuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds and others.

Vitamins and minerals: These are found in their ideal state in raw (and even more so, in organic) foods. Raw foods include uncooked, unbaked, unroasted: fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and sprouts. Studies indicate that between 30%-

The main anti-nutrients which damage the brain:

- **Damaged fats** – from fried food (in the incorrect oil) to hydrogenated fats (margarine, non-cold press vegetable oils like sunflower oil and canola oil).
- **Refined sugar** – carbohydrates robbed of essential nutrients (such as sugar, white flour, white pasta and white rice).
- **Chemical food additives** – colourings, flavourings, preservatives and additives. Additives are found in the form of MSG and “E additives”.
- **Toxic minerals** – from

copper to mercury (such as cigarette smoke, pesticides, fillings, vaccinations, non-stainless steel cookware, exhaust fumes, non-filtered water, baking powder and toothpastes, which contain fluoride).

There are ample excellent books and articles written regarding the above groups, explaining the damage they do to the brain, to emotions, the central nervous system, and to all the systems in the body.

SO WHAT IS LEFT TO EAT?

The topic of nutrition in our generation is really overwhelming. So many of the delicious foods that people and children enjoy eating are damaging to their health. People often shy away from the topic of nutrition, as they believe this is an all-or-nothing situation, and that from the moment they make such a commitment, they will turn into rabbits! Sure, this thought is quite scary. Another problem regarding healthy eating is restricting kids while their peers are not being restricted. This might create an issue of “relative deprivation”. The negative feelings that will emerge within a child due to this “deprivation” will inevitably create a chemical in the body called “cortisol”, which is toxic and acidic in its own right.

So now we are really stuck! Mothers who start introducing correct nutrition right from the birth of their first child, often find this job a lot easier than mothers such as myself, who only started once they had a few children! The first and foremost tip that I can give you is not to force nutrition on the family, just educate and have the good options available too. Use positive reinforcements when your child eats raw foods, such as: nuts, seeds, fruits and



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vegetables. The last thing you want is that your child will resent healthy food. You will need to read books about nutrition, like those of Patrick Holford, and share with your family the information that inspired you. At the same time you can implement some do-able changes, such as those listed below, which no one will mind and your food will taste so much better!

Cooking oil

– Instead of regular oils, use cold pressed coconut oil, cold pressed olive oil, grape seed oil, palm oil or organic butter.

Refined sugar – Instead, use raw honey, xylitol, dehydrated cane juice, or at least raw brown sugar.

Cold drinks – Instead, make iced herbal teas. You can take 5 tea bags of any herbal tea of your choice: mint, apple-cinnamon, berry and so on, add half a cup to a cup of

one of the sweeteners mentioned above. Add one cup of boiling water and mix. This is your concentrate. To this you can add cold water to your taste.

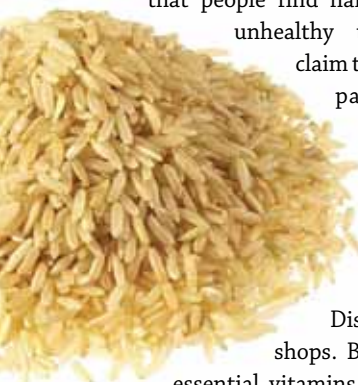
Chocolate drink – Mix one teaspoon organic cocoa powder with two teaspoons healthy sweetener, add a little hot water and simmer. Then add ¾ cup of milk and a little cream to top it up. It would be even nicer to add a drop of vanilla pod powder (obtainable at PnP).

White flour – Rather use organic brown flour (all cakes which do not require beating the egg white, work really well with this flour).

White pasta – You can get organic brown pasta (the Woolworths pasta, made in Italy, which contains no egg, is kosher). Even though it is more expensive, you will find that your family eats less of it, as the body feels that it has received the nutrition far more quickly than from “empty calorie pasta”. >



PHOTOGRAPHS: ILAN OSSENDRYVER; BIGSTOCKPHOTO; SUPPLIED



White rice – This is one of the food items that people find hard to convert from unhealthy to healthy. Many claim that you cannot compare brown rice to white rice. This may be true, until you have tasted ‘short grain brown rice’. Try it and see! You can get it at Dischem or at health shops. Brown rice is full of essential vitamins and minerals. One cup of short grain brown rice makes almost double the amount of white rice and fills one up a lot quicker; hence, one needs to eat less of it to get full.



Try to aspire to making sure 70%-80% of what your family eats is healthy. This should include as much raw food as possible.

Sweets and snacks – Sweets, snacks and any other junk food that children live for are problematic. Try minimising those foods by substituting them with home-made treats like health cakes and biscuits, Barney Natural Jelly (which can be found at supermarkets), organic and natural sweets (which can be found at health shops) and so on. If you buy ordinary sweets, choose those which have no colourants. If you buy crisps, try choosing the kind that does not contain MSG or other “E additives” (for example, it might say in the ingredients E551 or E627, etc). It is truly surprising that some items on the supermarkets shelves, which are advertised as healthy, can contain more than 10 “E additives”! It becomes obvious that the manufacturers reach off the buyer’s naivety.

Removing toxic minerals from the body is possible through the consumption of zinc and vitamin C.



A FEW PRACTICAL TIPS:

A powerful way of getting through to children regarding anything important is through the use of metaphors. A nice metaphor to use regarding health and junk food would be the following: In the air there are many tiny “bad soldiers” by the names of germs and bacteria. They want to get inside our bodies and live there. They cause the body to feel unwell. Hashem, who loves us, gave us many strong soldiers inside our body to fight those bad soldiers and not to let them enter. Those good soldiers are called “the white cells”. Every time we eat a fruit, a vegetable, nut, seeds and other healthy foods, these good soldiers get stronger and can fight better. For a non-neurotic child, you may want to add that every time he/she eats toxic food, it weakens the good soldiers. The above metaphor is a reality.

Try to aspire to making sure 70%-80% of what your family eats is healthy. This should include as much raw food as possible. You will then most likely be protected from potential harm, which may be caused by the rest of the 20%-30% (the unhealthy part) of the diet.

If you find that this change of diet is more expensive, you will find that conversely, you will buy less tinned food and junk food, and that your medicine bills will probably diminish.

Nutrition is not a matter of ‘all or nothing’. Any healthy food you eat will add to your vitality and will strengthen your immune system. Nutrition is not a one-day “changeover”; it is an exciting journey of healing on so many levels. It takes time to learn, to try, to implement and to see what works, but it is so worthwhile! Children don’t deserve to struggle with concentration difficulties, emotional and behavioural challenges. The key to their healing is very often in our hands.

This changeover will be most effective if it is done at a school level, where the principal and teachers encourage and guide parents on what food to send to school, what food should be recommended to be served at parties, and so on. The improvement on emotions, behaviour, concentration and general well-being among its young students should be tangible. **TL**

USEFUL NUMBERS

The cheapest brown organic flour can be ordered from Reform House (011 766-2917). They deliver. To order health rye rolls call 011 640 5698.

Dvori Blumenau is an educational psychologist in private practice, with a diploma in nutrition. “Eating and healing, from a spiritual, emotional and physiological perspective” is a practical course she gives to mothers and adolescents. For any queries you may contact her via mail: dvoripsychologist@gmail.com.