

Supporting Your Child with ADHD and Appetite Challenges



Pediatric Consultants Associated

Central Alberta Inc

182, 5201 43 Street

Red Deer, Alberta T4N 1C7

Phone: 403-343-6404

Fax: 403-343-6215

www.pediatricconsultants.ca

Introduction:

Parenting a child with ADHD can be both rewarding and challenging. One common issue parents face is managing their child's appetite. Children with ADHD often experience changes in appetite because of sensory sensitivities, hyperactivity or medication side effects. This handout offers guidance on how to support your child's nutritional needs.

Understanding the Challenges:

Children with ADHD may face several appetite-related challenges:

1. **Sensory Sensitivities:** Some children with ADHD may have sensory sensitivities that impact their food preferences. This may lead to picky eating as they try to avoid textures or flavors that they may dislike.
2. **Hyperactivity:** Children with ADHD often have high energy levels and may burn more calories than their peers, leading to increased hunger. Their hyperactivity might also lead to difficulty sitting still long enough to eat a full meal.
3. **Medication Side Effects:** Some ADHD medications can suppress appetite or cause nausea. If your child is on medication is essential to work closely with your child's healthcare provider to find medication that works best for them.

Tips for Supporting Your Child's Appetite:

1. **Have a consistent meal schedule:**
 - Establish a regular meal schedule with set times for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
 - Include nutritious snacks in between meals to provide a steady source of energy throughout the day.
2. **Offer nutrient-rich foods:**
 - Provide your child with a variety of nutrient-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains.
 - Experiment with different preparation methods to see if your child might like a food if is made in another way.

3. Drink enough water:

- Ensure your child drinks enough water throughout the day. Hydration is crucial for overall health and can help regulate appetite.

4. Optimize eating and medication timing:

- Consult with your child's healthcare provider to determine the best timing for ADHD medication. Some children find it easier to eat before taking their medication in the morning or after their medication has worn off in the afternoon.

5. Respect your child's sensory sensitivities:

- Work together to find foods your child enjoys that also meet their nutritional needs.
- Do try to gradually offer new foods, remaining patient and positive. It can be normal for children to be offered a new food multiple times before they will actually eat it.

6. Mealtime environment:

- Create a calm and distraction-free environment for meals. Limit screen time or other distractions during meals.
- Eat meals together as a family as often as possible. This promotes healthy eating habits and builds connections between family members.

7. Listen to your child:

- Pay attention to your child's hunger cues. Avoid forcing them to eat or making mealtimes a source of stress.
- Involve your child in meal planning and preparation. This can help your child feel a sense of control over what they are eating and may increase interest in trying new foods.

8. Seek Professional Guidance:

- If appetite challenges persist your family doctor or pediatrician can make a referral to a dietician. A dietician can provide advice about nutrition and mealtimes that are specific to your family.