Feeding Focus: How Nutrition Shapes ADHD in Kids Transcript

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Introduction to ADHD Root Causes

Welcome back to the Get to the Root podcast where we uncover the real reasons behind everyday health challenges and give you hope for healing. This is part two of our ADHD series.

Today, Dr. K dives under the surface to explore what's really driving ADHD symptoms. She talks about the role of chronic inflammation, how your genetics can influence brain chemistry, and why nutrient deficiencies matter, and what the gut has to do with focus and mood.

If you have ever wondered why ADHD looks so different from person to person, this episode will connect the dots. This podcast is for education and encouragement.

Please consult your health provider for personalized medical advice. Now a note from Dr. K about our sponsor. At Hope for Healing, we know that understanding your unique genetics can open the door to true healing.

Through our partnership with Legrand, we're able to use custom SNP panels that give us deeper insight into the root causes of health challenges. In this episode, we're shining a spotlight on the autophagy panel.

This is critical in providing glucose into all the cells, especially the brain, to help with attention and focus. We're thankful for Fagwan's sponsorship of this podcast and their role in helping us deliver care that's as individual as you are.

Let's really start to unpack how nutrition can impact the ADHD child. Okay, so let's just go through the basics, right?

Feingold Diet and Food Additives

And so a lot of these, Ella, if you're listening, this may be something you're already doing or there may be new things, but we're going to start with kind of the basics.

Is there, if my child has been diagnosed with ADHD, are there like the simple like one, two, three that I should either cut out or add? Or let's just start with cut out first.

Yeah, that's a really great question. And actually, when Dr. Feingold started recommending this decades ago, they thought he was crazy, just like people thought that lead poisoning was crazy.

And then we went from lead pencil to graphite. So Dr. Benjamin Feingold published what's called the Feingold diet, and they lacked at him. But now it is currently in medical school curriculums.

So it's pretty simple. It's about removing artificial food additives, and a lot of that's been in the news lately, you know, specifically FD&C red number 40, which is known to be carcinogenic, then yellow number five, those two in particular should be removed.

Also, any artificial sweeteners such as aspartame, aspartame is carcinogenic, and I don't, and we just basically need to remove it. And when you eat artificial sweeteners, it actually ends up making you gain weight.

You know, in the diet, sodas and things like that, I would rather that you have 12 teaspoons of sugar in a can of soda versus artificial sweetener because you're altering your gut microbes.

So sugar is not good for you. So also removing as many preservatives, you know, it's eating a whole food diet. So and when we think about when you look at a box, if you can't pronounce the names, you really should just bypass it.

So those are the things to leave out. Also, the fine gold diet talks about salicylates, but you know. And what are salicylates? Solicilates are substances that are found in apples, oranges, berries, and some vegetables and nuts.

But I would start with the non-food things first, like the dyes, the preservatives, and the artificial sweeteners. So what I hear you saying is that we're going to start with processed foods and sugar first.

And when it comes to lowering salicylates, that would be your final step. But I know in the past, we've talked about really what gluten and dairy does and how it can almost mimic opioid responses.

Would that have anything to do with somebody either being pulled away from or that kind of trigger? What happens with ADHD and gluten and dairy? Well, when you consume gluten and dairy, you also bind to opioid receptors, which make you feel good.

But then when that wears off, there's this desire to have more.

Gluten, Dairy, and Salicylates

And there's that dopamine seeking. Okay, reward type behavior. So not only are you blocking dopamine production, but it can cause these massive ups and downs in behavior and inattentiveness.

So removing the gluten in the dairy so that that inflammatory component is gone and the addictive potential You know, Lauren, you asked me also about foods that are high in salicylates.

And, you know, in general, we know how important it is to avoid artificial sweeteners, carcinogenic dyes, and those kind of things. But when we think about salicylates, you don't want to be, I can't have any of these.

It's just the in moderation. So that's like lots of berries, cucumbers, pickles, currants, grapes, raisins, plums, prunes. other things to look at that are kind of high in salicylate.

Well, and I think this is kind of what you were talking about at the beginning, and you can correct me if I'm wrong, but it's whole foods and balance, right?

And I think that's what can be kind of hard when we see these things in children. because how I mean like this is like a repetitive thing is like how frequently do they find their five foods that they love and even if they're healthy foods it doesn't mean that the body doesn't still need balance and introduction and so since we're talking about nutrition how would even if they are healthy picky eaters right so they're things that are healthy but they're like I still only eat these five healthy things How does a parent start to introduce these new foods to kind of balance out their diet?

Because I think parents are afraid, like, well, I don't want my child to starve. And well, at least they're eating cucumbers all the time. But now we're saying, maybe we need to balance that out.

So how do we start that process? Yeah, you know, you want the least amount of trauma, the least amount of fights, you have to pick your battles. And just a principle that we've talked about, you know, many times it takes offering something up to 12 times for a child to accept it.

I wouldn't make a big deal about it. but you offer something and you don't necessarily make the other things.

Introducing New Foods to Picky Eaters

It's like, hey, try a little bite of this and one of the other siblings and just role play, oh, this is yummy. You still need to think about the five or three main food groups, which are your healthy fats and your proteins and the breakdown of that is amino acids, which we know we burn through when we've got ADD, ADHD symptoms.

Can you talk about why that, what that happens? Or why is it so like the nutrition piece that you just said? You're

like, we need to get amino acids. Well, what happened here?

Well, when you're inattentive and you're struggling with the tension, you can look at the nail beds of yourself or your child. And you should have a half moon on your thumb, but you should see half moon all the way to finger number four.

And if you don't, that means you're not absorbing enough amino acids. Now, why is that a big deal? All the neurotransmitters are made out of short-chain amino acids.

Acetylcholine, which is excitatory, we need, you know, to be able to replenish it. And so if your kiddo doesn't like meat, they don't like eggs. So sometimes providing them with amino acids that taste yummy and you have a variety of vanilla and chocolate and unflavored, then we have electrolyte solutions with it.

You want to make sure they're getting enough of those amino acids because if they're going to burn through certain neurotransmitters that are made out of those little amino acids, that you replenish them.

And when you have a picky eater, that's difficult. introducing new things. I want to kind of summarize what you said to ensure that like I'm processing it too, is that one, that it can take a while.

So just because they said no 10 times doesn't mean that they're going to say no forever, right? And so it's that constant. But I also love that grace around the we do not want to traumatize a child around food.

Dr. K, you and I have talked about this on and off different recordings is that that does stick with you for years to come. And so I really love that you address the fact that we are not trying to make the dinner table an unsafe place.

We want that to be a safe place. But I love that you've mentioned just because they said no this many times doesn't mean they're not eventually going to try it.

And then two is the We're not making the other option. So other families have the thank you bite, which is like, they just try it and they're like, hey, we're going to be grateful for what it is.

And it doesn't have to be your favorite right now. And I know in the past, we've also talked about honest conversations, right? Like, we're going to try this all together as a family.

that we're not putting. So I really love that you talked about it. But yes, as you said before, is that we need proteins and we need amino acids and we need healthy fats.

But this carbohydrate thing and the carbs can be really overwhelming to kind of unpack.

Protein, Amino Acids, and Carbs

So we'd love for you to give us kind of more information on that. Well, you know, trying to find something that your child likes that's loaded with protein that still tastes carby.

So equip protein. You can make waffles and crepes and pancakes and load those with protein and add in a few dark chocolate chips or blueberries and put a smidge of a nut butter on top of it or a smidge of maple syrup.

And then that way, you've gotten protein, you've gotten carbs in there, and you're feeding that. Now, also with carbs, you want to go with healthier options.

So go with your fruits, all right? go with complex carbs such as, you know, that are high in fiber too, such as, you know, a Medjool date that will help your kiddo poop, plus it's kind of naturally sweet.

And then the date lady products, you get a little bit of that sweetness in there too. I like their chocolate spread, the date lady chocolate spread, but carbs think real food, real food.

And if your kiddo just snubs their nose at like broccoli or asparagus or just a tiny amount, just have it available. You're not a short order kid. And you can go a long way with legumes, beans, quinoa.

Instead of beans and rice, beans and quinoa, lentils and beans, you can make bean hummus and nobody's the wiser. It tastes really yummy. Carrot hummus, you know, just changing it up, make it aesthetically pleasing.

I really love the anti-anxiety diet cookbook by Ali Miller because it has a lot of kid-friendly and nice eye appeal. and snip appeal and touch appeal too.

But you can make delicious things, but it is hit or miss. And you're thinking, oh, you don't know my child. All they'll eat is X, X, X, and X. Rome wasn't built in a day, one thing at a time.

And don't stereotype your child and don't give up on your home environment. You can change. Yeah, absolutely Well, and I feel like the honesty is that your child does change, right?

So their child has adapted and will continue to adapt and I really love that the grace approach in that kind of step-by-step and allowing your space because you aren't trying like where I think it can be overwhelming is that they are trying to fix it all overnight and Like we're gonna fix this this month and I was like, you know Your child is and you are gonna go at different paces and so but the fact is is progress over perfection and so we like will do a lot of that and like health coaching is that we're like, okay, so you were running at 25% healthy foods and now you're at 50. Like we're trying to get into a progress bar, not a perfection bar.

And so I think sometimes that perfection mindset can get in the way of actually applying things that people know to be true.

Sugar, Autophagy, and Sweet Treats

It's like, I don't know how I'm going to do this all the time. Don't try to do it all the time. Try to do it today and making that step. And so I love that.

OK, so I think we talk about this a lot where sugar kind of gets like glossed over sometimes or it gets the 100% bad rap. Like it is the worst thing in the world.

And you kind of touched on why artificial sugars aren't great. But are there, when someone wants a sweet treat and everything, like, first off, how does sugar in itself kind of affect ADHD?

But are there things people can eat that are sweet that are still enjoyable? You know, you want your child to live a full life. So what does that look like?

Yeah. So if your brain or your cells was not getting enough energy, you would crave sugar. Implicit in many, many of the kids and adults in our practice that we do precision genetics, we see that their cells don't have enough receptors to pull in healthy glucose from the bloodstream.

So that leaves them hangry. And if you've noticed in your children, they just get really feisty and icky. And you're like, oh gosh, I got to feed them.

Then they're calm. Then they're happy. I love you, Mommy. I love you, Daddy." One of my kids, who's an adult, still does that. We go to dinner and she goes, oh, I love you guys so much.

And it's spontaneous. And so autophagy means self-feeding. But what's that have to do with ADD, ADHD? Well, if you notice that your children have this kind of roller coaster, you got to feed them frequently every couple hours for them to be reasonable and not just be mean and feisty and that they seem to really settle once they eat or they have to eat frequently, then they probably have impaired autophagy.

So, the types of things that you feed them are important. So, I like healthy fats and protein if you can do that, but

when they do want sweet treats, remember that refined white sugar is a one-to-one swap for organic coconut sugar.

Now, organic coconut sugar is obviously a little brown. But it's a one-to-one swap if you're making cookies, okay? So if you find a good gluten-free recipe, then you can swap.

Hopefully that would also have like a coconut sugar in there. And you can make coconut sugar lemonade so they can get their sweet and like it too. Now also when we think about fruits, foods that may have what we call a high glycemic index, like watermelon and cantaloupe and honeydew melon, that means you have to eat a whole bunch of it because it's so watery in order for it to be high glycemic index.

So if your kids like those things, let them have honeydew melon, cantaloupe, watermelon, watermelon, juice and watermelon, it's so watery that it's satisfying, but it's also just creating that like for those things, okay?

Now, mangoes are high glycemic index, but they're satisfying, and so just instead of going from your fruit roll-up, which is full of carcinogenic dyes, artificial sweeteners and real refined sugar that's going to cause cancer and is going to make your kids crazy, make a transition over to a real fruit, okay?

Pick your fruit and, you know, you have to balance that, but you're satisfying that sweet too. 72% cacao dark chocolate, allowing your child, instead of them eating it and crunching it all up and swallowing it, giving them a square if they're old enough to do this and suck on it, suck to the roof of their mouth and see if they can suck on it until it disappears and that'll make more serotonin.

So that's a nice little sweet treat hack. But we have lots of recipes and things that are great options for subbing things out. And many times people are none the wiser.

Yeah, absolutely. That was, I mean, like in several of the roughest seeds that we created, that was the point when we were kind of digging into it is we didn't want the first thing to be like, this is healthy.

We didn't be like, oh, this is good. And we can't believe this is healthy. What we will say also is like taste buds do change. And so allowing the space to go, this doesn't taste as good.

Autophagy Panel and Family Nutrition

I remember hearing a story of being like, if you're going to constantly eat things like M&Ms and everything, and then you try a strawberry, the strawberry won't taste the same as if you were just to eat the strawberry.

And so you are teaching your typespuds what they like, but our body was designed to change and adapt. and allowing it to adapt to the good things that God has designed for us to do is super brilliant when it comes to that.

But yeah, so you said that it could talk about impaired autophagy. How would someone know that their autophagy is impaired or that they could be susceptible to impaired autophagy?

Well, the description, needing to eat frequently, getting hangry, getting headaches if you don't eat every two to three hours, even breaking out in a sweat.

You've got to feed yourself very frequently. That's a sign that you have impaired autophagy. And for your children, that irritability, that running around, you can pick out when they're hangry.

And when we tie that back into ADD, ADHD, if you can't deliver fuel to your brain cells, then that's a big deal. But if people wanted to order the autophagy panel to determine if they have that, then we could let you know exactly what you need.

There's this wonderful substance that when you take it, and it's naturally kind of sweet, which is kind of ironic, it allows insulin to bind to the receptors, glucose to bind and come into the cell.

But if you're looking at your life or your child, type 2 diabetes is a sign that you have impaired autophagy, and elevated hemoglobin A1c is a sign that you have impaired autophagy.

If there's a family history of cancer, If you can't clean your cells out or provide your cells fuel to do that, then that's what happens. But in our kids with ADD, ADHD, they're lost without their food.

So they've got to have food. So you said autophagy panel. What is that? Like, what kind of panel is it? Yeah, so it's a cheek swab that you could order.

We partner with Fogron Genomics here at Hope for Healing, and it's a simple cheek swab, and then we could do a brief review with you wherever you are in the world.

and just give you some recommendations, and it outlines several aspects of that. If you are greatly impaired, how much we'll recommend. It allows that glucose to come into the cells, and even children, it's naturally sweet, so you can touch it with spit.

My grandson is five. His mother dumps the capsule that contents on his tongue and he swallows it. We just give him some water because it's naturally kind of sweet.

You can also open it up on parchment paper and lick it with your saliva. But you know, Lauren, what you had touched on as far as like healthy sugars and things like that, I would say complexity.

So, you know, a lot of times we don't talk so much about honey, but a little bit of honey, a little bit of maple syrup. You know, it's nature's sweetness and the visual dates and those kind of things and some of the fruits.

and taking your kids through the produce department and finding those fruits and just experimenting. Hey, do you want to try a plum? Oh, no. Well, how about the inside of a plum?

Because it's got an outside coating. Just a taste of it. Just a dot. Not a lot. You don't even, you could stick your finger in the juice. just being open and then modeling that at home.

You'll feel like a dork, but if your child absolutely refuses, just cut it open, squeeze a little juice out, you know, let them see you licking it, that kind of a thing.

It's an option. I love that. Thank you for giving so many simple ways of how nutrition and the ways that we can kind of take a stab at even those who are constantly eating healthy and that are not putting gluten in dairy or maybe those higher sugars, but ways to get them to try new foods.

And so overall, would you say that like the needle mover of nutrition and ADHD is kind of one of some of those necessary first steps when trying to support a child who has ADHD either been diagnosed or has ADHD symptoms?

Absolutely, and really the whole family needs to be on board because many times a parent struggles with the same things and what's good for the child is going to be good for mom and dad.

And so, you know, you're working toward, and we say this a lot, creating a sanctuary in your kitchen. So start using up those things and just don't buy them back.

Don't fill them. If you have older kids that drive and are buying their own things, ask them not to let their little siblings have it. You can't stop teenagers, but as parents, you don't have to buy it and you want to replace it with things that everybody likes.

So, you know, like you said, we're not aiming for perfection, but it's just one step at a time, removing things that shouldn't be there and replacing it with healthier options, real food.

I love that. That wraps up part two of our ADHD series. Now that we've uncovered some of the hidden root causes from inflammation to nutrition needs, it's time to put that knowledge into action.

If you want any of the steps or tips that she suggested in today's episode, make sure to take a look in our show notes. And stay tuned for our next episode where we'll dig into another missing piece of the puzzle, neurotransmitters.

We'll talk about dopamine and glutamate and how your child's genetics can affect brain chemistry. Subscribe so you're ready for part three of our ADHD series.

And as always, remember, there is hope for healing.