

# STRATEGIES FOR “SETTING” YOUR CHILD FOR A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL YEAR

Good sleep, adequate nutrition and daily exercise can play a major part in setting your child’s brain to keep the right level of alertness, mood control and ability to learn and interact with peers and therefore HAVE A GREAT DAY AT SCHOOL AND A MORE SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL YEAR.

Below you will find some information to help you understand why these are important and what you can do as a parent to foster your child’s learning at school and even help get you through homework after school!

## SLEEP

### 1. What is “good sleep”

Sleep is a restorative biologically regulated state which replenishes the system on all levels including cellular, endocrine, immune, metabolic, physical and emotional levels.

### 2. What if we don’t get “good sleep” ?

Poor sleep leads to:

- Depressed mood
- Reduced energy
- Altered hormone production (hypothalamus: body temp; food intake; thirst, wake/sleep states)
- Increased irritability
- Increased reactivity
- Increased stress (reduced threshold for stress)
- Decreased memory
- Decreased healing

### 3. What influences sleep?

a) Stress – can be psychological, physical, emotional, environmental, nutritional or chemical. Common stressors for children include:

- chronic illness
- poor nutrition – food sensitivities/allergies; lack of protein; reduced fatty acids (omega 3 and omega 6); reduced trace minerals (calcium; magnesium); lower B6 levels
- sedentary lifestyle
- dysfunctional family
- chaotic home or school environment
- lack of routines or predictability

- b) Sleep apnea – absence of breathing several times per night
- c) Drugs/stimulants – caffeine in coffee; cola; hot cocoa, tea, iced tea; OTC medicines e.g. Benedryl (14% alcohol). Usually go to sleep but wake after 3 hours if alcohol intake.
- d) Low serotonin levels – derived from amino acid L tryptophan - need protein in the diet

#### 4. How can we improve sleep?

Good sleep hygiene – a regular sleep routine.

- a. Darken the room; no light night
- b. Go to bed at same time each night
- c. Preschoolers: 7.00-7.30; school age 8.00-8.30
- d. Follow a bedtime routine
  - i. Start 30 mins before bedtime
  - ii. 15 minute warm bath
  - iii. Deep rubdown that is rhythmic and sustained
  - iv. Cover with weighed blanket or Afghan (unless child resists; don't force
  - v. Quietly read a bedtime story – 2-3 pages; rhyming words can help
  - vi. ABSOLUTELY NO TV OR VIDEO GAMES ONE HOUR BEFORE BEDTIME
  - vii. Play soft lullabies – instrumental preferably
  - viii. Dim the bedroom light; once asleep turn it off; make room dark!
  - ix. Say goodnight!
  - x. FOLLOW ROUTINE EVERY NIGHT SAME TIME!
  - xi. Rhythm, rhyme and repetition help brain and body get calm.
  - xii. Avoid play wrestling; video games, TV/computer; loud/fast music or aerobic exercise prior to bedtime
- e. Environment – low light; quiet; regular area for sleep; no visual distracters such as toys
- b) Exercise – regular exercise at least 4-5 hours before sleep has been shown to improve sleep states. Exercise too close to bedtime can disrupt sleep
- c) Stress reduction; calming activities; use of aromatherapy e.g. lavender bath; lavender pillow
- d) Sleep apnea – if your child snores consult a physician re: adenoids or other issues that may affect quality of sleep and thus attention at school
- e) Good nutrition

When your child goes off to school, your role in teaching your child about good nutrition is not over. Your child will face choices and there will be outside influences of the environment and peers. Nutrition is very important for having the right brain chemistry to learn and behave in the classroom. See below for more detailed information. Most important, is the timing of nutrition. Make sure that your child goes to school with protein in their belly as this will help them do best with academics and not have the mid-morning slump afforded by a high carbohydrate, sugary breakfast. Make sure snacks also contain protein i.e. cheese and whole wheat crackers or a yogurt.

## NUTRITION

But he won't eat good food! You are in charge of what you provide your child to eat. The first thing is to model good nutrition and try to sit down at a table for each meal. Habits formed in childhood will set the stage for your child's long term health. For more information on Nutrition for School-Aged Children see [http://www.healthgoods.com/education/Nutrition\\_Information/Nutrition\\_and\\_Health/nutrition\\_school\\_child.htm](http://www.healthgoods.com/education/Nutrition_Information/Nutrition_and_Health/nutrition_school_child.htm) (University of Nebrasksa-Lincoln Extension or google Nutrition for School-aged Children.

Furthermore, consider the timing of food.

*"We are not only what we eat but when we eat". Paul Halberg*

1. Eat protein in morning for breakfast and lunch and favor carbohydrates for dinner.

Protein is the basic structural material of the body and is made of very long chains like a bunch of paper clips clipped together. We can live without carbohydrates (carbs) but without protein you will die.

You need protein in the morning to make the neurochemistry for the day, especially the adrenergic chemicals, which influence attention and behavior.

Carbs help keep the blood sugar level high for nighttime activities of detoxification, repair and restoration. They also help absorb tryptophan and other nutrients needed for sleep.

Dr Sidney Baker (The Circadian Diet book) suggests the following for children:

Breakfast: eggs, turkey bacon, sausage, chicken etc. If they won't eat that try a protein shake:

### Rhythmic Shake or make shake popsicles

3 ounces whole milk  
3 ounces regular yogurt (plain not flavored/artificially colored)  
1 tablespoon ground flaxseed  
3 tablespoons soy protein isolate (different flavors available)  
¼ cup blueberries

Put yogurt and milk in blender. With blender on low speed, add ground flaxseeds, soy protein powder, and blueberries. Increase speed until well blended. Make just before drinking as flaxseed will thicken it. Can also make it with rice milk (6 ounces rice milk) if sensitivity to milk or soy. Can add special green food powder to increase phytonutrients. May try without flaxseed first.

10 BASIC rules of the circadian diet:

1. Add protein to morning meal and lunch – Emphasize fish, eggs, milk products, nuts, peanuts, soy, chicken, beans and meat. Can have fish sticks for breakfast, bean enchilada if child wants. Do not overdo protein – 40 to 60 % protein in diet, not 100%.
2. Move most of carbs from breakfast, lunch and snacks to evening. At 4pm. Cut back on protein in favor of carbs – pasta bread, potato, sweet potato, other starchy vegetables; whole cereal grains, seeds, sprouts, fruit. Sweet s in moderation. Still have protein just less in relation to carbs.
3. Eat plenty of fresh vegetables or take advantage of their fiber which protect from disease, especially heart disease.  
Green leafy vegetables are low on starch and can be eaten any time of the day. Eat veges from roots that tend to be starchy at night – carrots, beets, rutabagas, turnips, parsnips. Tuber vegetables such as potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams are almost pure starch and should be eaten in the evening. Sweet corn is really a cereal grain and not a vegetable!
4. Eat plenty of fresh fruit but save it for the evening. Raw fruit has can increase your blood sugar level but has enough fiber to cancel out the effects. Can still eat an apple with lunch or blueberries in a shake. Favor fruit to p.m or evening if possible.
5. Eliminate artificial sweeteners and diet drinks. Artificial sweeteners tease the metabolism – sugar trickery! Tells your body to get the insulin ready for the sugar coming. Insulin grabs whatever sugar is available, pushes it into the cells. Blood sugar level drops and then it swings back into looking for more sugar.
6. Consume healthy oils – fats are circadian neutral but there are good and bad fats. Olive oil is a good fat – monosaturated oil; cold pressed. Also canola oil and walnut oil are good. Omega 3 supplements such as fish oil (see internet site nordicnaturals.com) are good and are best taken in the morning . The US diet is too heavy on Omega 6 and most children can benefit from taking Omega 3 supplement as the body cannot make enough of it via fish.
7. Drink plenty of water per day. Water is needed for every cell and organ.
8. Eat regularly – best schedule is breakfast at 7am, lunch at midday and dinner in the early evening. Stay consistent.
9. If you suspect reactions/sensitivity to food e.g. gas, bloating, constipation, diarrhea, unexplained skin rashes, red cheeks and/or ears; skin folds under the eyes or signs of yeast, consult with your physician regarding a referral to an allergist. This is also relevant for seasonal allergies.

## **EXERCISE**

### **Before school routine:**

Have the whole family engage in some physical activity (10-15 minutes) prior to school/work. Getting out of bed 10 minutes earlier may lead to a smoother transition to the morning self-care routine!

Possibilities include:

- Dance video or other videos such as gymball routine for children
- Indoor trampoline
- Basketball and hoop under cover if possible
- 10 minute family workout: Push-ups; jumping jacks; wheelbarrow walks with a target game e.g. beanbags into a bucket.
- Indoor trapeze bar with doorway support bar for children less than 75 pounds weight - swinging in doorway - see [www.sensoryedge.com](http://www.sensoryedge.com) or google "indoor trapeze bar" and "doorway support bar". Always follow instructions as per manufacturer for safe use.
- Stop off at park or sufficient time for outdoor play at school e.g. swinging, monkey bars

Exercise will increase serotonin and endorphins.

After school routine:

### **HOMEWORK SUPPORT**

Some children do better to go out and play first. Try to encourage heavy work e.g. playground climbing, swinging and hanging from a bar. Bike riding is also good.

1. Provide crunchy, healthy snacks
2. Prior to homework, do a 10-15 minute brain wake-up routine (as above)
3. Do indoor brain tune-ups e.g. quick hang upside down on indoor trapeze and swing; 20 wall push-ups then go back to finish homework

For parents who know that their child will really benefit from sensory activities see Alert Program internet site (<http://www.alertprogram.com/>) for more information. If your child receives therapy at school, consult your school therapist for ideas at home. If possible, attend a session with your school therapist to get more information.

We sincerely hope that this will be helpful to your child to ensure a wonderful school year, to compliment your child and teacher's work in the classroom.