

# BACK TO SCHOOL



Wouldn't you like to give your children a head-start in the coming school year?



Going back to school, or the first day at a new school, can be a stressful time for children. They have a lot to deal with, including new teachers, new friends, new rules and a bombardment of new information. And all this has to be taken in and dealt with in a very short space of time! It's therefore not unusual for excitement and anticipation to be combined with a certain level of anxiety, and even dread, about the tasks and situations that lie ahead. Fortunately there are some great solutions in naturopathic medicine.

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**GET THE BRAIN FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS!**

It is well documented that certain herbs can support brain function and help in dealing with stress. These include brahmi, ginkgo biloba and gotu kola. These medicinal herbs have been shown to improve memory and learning in children by balancing brain neurotransmitters such as dopamine, acetylcholine and serotonin. Balancing brain chemicals goes a long way towards improving focus, concentration and memory.

**DOES YOUR CHILD GET STRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW SCHOOL YEAR?**

It's important to address any stress or anxiety that a child is experiencing at the beginning of

a new school year, as these have been shown to interfere with confidence, attention and behaviour. Untreated anxiety can lead to inattention and behavioural issues, contributing to what is known as ADHD – attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Herbs such as passion flower, German chamomile and ziziphus have a calming effect while improving focus and behaviour. In combination these herbs can help children get to sleep more easily as well as deal with daytime anxiety.

Adequate nutrition is essential in supporting the brain. Valuable vitamins and minerals include zinc, magnesium, iron, B-vitamins, folate and vitamin C. Discuss dosages with your naturopathic physician.

‘Balancing brain chemicals goes a long way towards improving focus, concentration and memory’

Iron is especially important, and is a key nutrient for the brain. It is often found to be deficient in children with ADD and ADHD, and is essential for energy production. Low iron or ferritin stores predispose to lethargy, irritability, apathy, fatigue and inability to concentrate.

Along with a balanced diet, it is crucial that the above nutrients are included in a back-to-school health programme. Many companies now manufacture multivitamin and mineral supplements specially tailored to children's needs, which can be taken in a child-friendly

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It's a fact: the brain and retina contain more DHA than any other tissue in the human body. A number of studies have shown DHA to enhance learning and memory. It is therefore recommend to children and teenagers who have learning difficulties and to students under high pressure. It is, however, essential that the DHA comes from purified fish oil, as

fish oil may be contaminated by heavy metals such as mercury. Some manufacturers of fish oil guarantee its quality by using a special nitrogen flushing system, but others do not, and such products could be harmful to your child. So be sure to check your fish oil source.

**DIET**

Unfortunately children tend not to eat enough oily fish such as salmon, tuna, mackerel and sardines, so it is important to encourage consumption of these as much as possible. It's best to select small fillets, and to minimise consumption of deep-sea fish as these have been shown to have the highest mercury content. If all else fails, opt for a supplement. Your naturopathic physician will recommend a good one.

‘ Low iron or ferritin stores predispose to lethargy, irritability, apathy, fatigue and inability to concentrate ’

**Breakfast on brain food**

It is essential for children to start the day with a nutritious breakfast packed with vitamins, minerals and protein. There are many commercial cereals on the market that promise a lot but contain high levels of sugar, which can affect concentration. Whole-grain cereals make the best breakfast!

Protein is essential for brain balance and acuity, as it is responsible for the production of neurotransmitters in the brain. Eggs make a

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wonderful breakfast – they are a complete protein and contain all the essential amino acids to maintain healthy blood sugar levels throughout the morning.

Sometimes eating breakfast just feels like too much too early, and if this is a problem for your child, a smoothie is a great way to ensure intake of protein in the morning. Blend cow's milk (whole or skim) or goat's milk with a dollop of yoghurt, fruit such as berries or banana, extras such as lecithin granules, soy, rice or whey protein, and even any supplements the child may be taking.

**SLEEP**

Children need more sleep than adults, especially during their earlier school years, and lack of sleep can affect learning ability. So be sure to get them off to bed at a reasonable time – between 7.30 and 8 p.m. is optimal.

A regular schedule is important and will help to keep stress levels down at the beginning and end of the day.

Last but not least, don't forget to encourage creative expression and expression of the emotions. This not only develops communication skills in the long term but improves insight into how the child is doing on a daily basis. ●



# Back to school!

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