

Back To School Special Issue

Attention and concentration at school.

Special report by Ruth Sladek B HSc (Nat & Nut): Naturopath Kenmore Centre for Health



As school and uni students settle into the year it is a good time to review issues which can impact on academic performance. Concentration and focus can be a huge challenge of students of all ages. This can range from ADHD to general lack of focus, inability to concentrate and brain fog. As a Naturopath I see several causes as well as possible solutions for these problems. I have outlined a few common issues below:

1. **Diet:** possibly the most important factor when it comes to optimum brain performance. Our brains preferred fuel is sugar. However refined sugar and carbohydrates (biscuits, sugary cereals, soft drink) will give us a spike of energy for a short amount of time but after that will leave our brains with no energy. This makes focus and concentration very hard. A drop in blood sugar has also been linked to a release of adrenaline which can cause restlessness and impulsive behaviour. A diet high in complex carbohydrate (whole grains , cereals) as well as adequate amounts of protein (meat, dairy products, nuts, legumes) can prevent blood sugar highs and lows and is able to supply our brains with a more sustainable source of energy.

2. **Nutritional deficiencies:** Children are growing and developing and have a high demand for nutrients, however they can be fussy eaters so nutrient deficiencies are common. One of the most common nutritional deficiencies in school age children is iron. Low iron levels can cause decreased focus and a lower attention span. Studies on children with ADHD found low levels of zinc and magnesium in a large number of those children. Omega 3 (fish oil) is important for nervous system function and brain function. Low levels are associated with behavioural problems. Children with ADHD seem to have impaired ability to absorb and utilise omega 3, which makes their demand for it even higher. Most of our diets are low in omega 3. So a good quality Fish oil supplement can safely be given to most children in the recommended dose. For other nutrients a Naturopath or Doctor can organise tests to confirm nutrient deficiencies.

3. **Food sensitivities:** A sensitivity to certain foods can cause either hyperactivity and impulsive behaviour after consumption or lethargy and inability to focus. These effects can be seen anywhere between immediately after consumption of the food to several hours after consumption of these foods. Foods commonly causing these reactions are: food colours, flavour enhancers, salicylates, sulphates, wheat, soy, eggs, corn. Dietary elimination of suspected foods can sometimes be helpful, however it can be difficult to pin point the offending foods. A Naturopath can organise testing for food sensitivities.

4. **Herbal remedies:** There are a number of herbs which can improve memory and focus as well help calm down the nervous system. These herbs can be useful for students of all ages. Some of these herbs are Bacopa, Skullcap, Ginkgo biloba, Withania, Lemon balm and Gotu kola.



This Issue

- Improve school concentration
- Why take fish oil
- Acupuncture & brain balance

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5. **Adequate Sleep.** In this age of technological devices there are multiple distractions to getting enough sleep. Primary school age children and teenagers need 9-10 hours sleep a night, adults about 8. Even half an hour extra sleep has been shown to dramatically improve a child's school performance.

6. **Avoid self-medicating.** It is always best to seek advice from a well-trained professional to ensure that the products are both necessary and suitable for your individual circumstances. We use only the best quality products at the clinic ensuring that clients actually receive the intended dose of the target nutrient. We also use a range of high purity fish oil to suit the range of palates for all ages.

Are supplements essential to health?

by Stephen Janz RN BN BA GCCHM MPH: Clinic Director Kenmore Centre for Health

I am often asked just what supplements should people take on a daily basis just to stay well. There are a range of views on this issue, however I contend that for people without specific health complaints there are three supplements to consider on a regular basis to support daily wellbeing; fish oil, a probiotic and a multivitamin. For this issue the focus is on fish oil. Fish oil is a source of the omega 3 essential fatty acids EPA & DHA. They are called essential because the body cannot make them – they are either in the diet or the body has to make do without it. Omega-3 fatty acids are highly concentrated in the brain and appear to be important for memory and brain performance as well as normal growth and development. This is why they seem helpful in children's learning and behaviour problems. Symptoms of omega-3 fatty acid deficiency include fatigue, poor memory, dry skin, heart problems, mood swings or depression, and poor circulation. The anti-inflammatory properties of fish oils have led to a role in preventing chronic diseases such as heart disease, arthritis, cancer and even macular degeneration (higher doses of fish oil are used in these conditions). Good sources of EPA & DHA include cold water oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, sardines, tuna, and herring. Vegetarians can have difficulty getting adequate Omega 3's as the plant based Omega 3 (Alpha linoleic acid (ALA)) found in flaxseed oil and canola oil

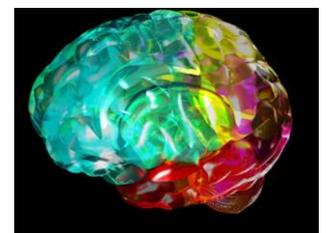


needs to be converted to EPA and DHA in the body to be useful, and not everyone makes this conversion effectively.

The National Health & Medical Research Council recommends eating at least two oily fish meals per week to meet the recommended daily intake of EPA & DHA. Caution should apply though to which and how much fish is eaten. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) cautions pregnant women and young children to limit their fish intake due to the mercury levels found in fish. Two or three serves of tuna or salmon a week is safe, but avoid shark (also called flake, if shark is eaten then no other fish should be eaten for two weeks); and if orange roughy (deep sea perch) or catfish is eaten make it the only fish meal for the week. If adequate fish does not make it into your diet or if higher quantities of fish oil is to be used therapeutically, then a high quality supplement should be used. We recommend a fish oil supplement that meets the European standards for purity as they are stricter than the Australian standards for fish oil. The Omega fatty acids are essential for health and development and many people do not get enough in their diet. A high quality supplement is safe way to ensure that this vital nutrient can do its job. Have a look at our webpage for more on fish oil as well as probiotics and multivitamins.

Balancing the Brain with Acupuncture (or Laser)

The goal of acupuncture is to identify imbalances in the body and the carefully choose points to bring the body back to normal function. This principle allows acupuncture to treat a range of conditions including stress and mood disorders, hormonal and fertility problems, immune and digestive disorders to name a few. One system of acupuncture called auricular acupuncture specifically targets the co-ordination of brain function. The ear is innervated by two cranial nerves which bypass the spinal chord and originate directly in the brain. Stimulating appropriate points on the ear with either acupuncture pins or needle-free laser has a balancing effect directly on brain function. Treatment usually results in feeling relaxed followed by clearer thinking, improved mood and often better concentration and sleep. Usually three treatments a week apart have a distinct effect. We use laser instead of pins for children and sensitive adults.



Our Practitioners: Acupuncture & Chinese Medicine: Stephen Janz, Ian Murray, Michelle Blum
Naturopathy: Ruth Sladek Massage: Uli Graf, Teena Stefanovic, Monica Levine