

Getting Started with Nutritional Protocols for Developmental Delays and Other Special Needs

About Alternative Treatments:

When I noticed my daughter was delayed I started looking for correlations between what she ate and was exposed to and how she acted. I knew her issues were not stand-alone issues. It seemed to me that everything was connected in her little body; the lack of sleeping, low tone, delays, allergies, and so on. So I chose to look into treatments that treat the whole body, that's what a lot of nutrition-based therapy does. This is what we've tried, things that I consider to be low risk. *Please note that I'm just a mom and not a medical professional. Please always look into the benefits and risks of anything you do for your child, regardless of who recommends it.*

An overview of strategies and where to get more information

Whole, Natural Foods Approach to Diet

When looking to modify your child's diet, a good place to start is removing all the chemicals from his food. Your health food store is a great place to start since most of their food will be okay, but if you're careful about reading labels you can choose chemical-free options at your local grocery store as well. Top things to avoid: Food colorings, artificial flavorings, chemicals used to preserve food, hydrogenated oils. Consider avoiding: MSG, corn syrup. Look into adding: Naturally fermented foods such as yogurt and lactofermented sauerkraut, organic grass fed meat.

Recommended reading: [Real Food by Nina Planck](#), [Nourishing Traditions by Sally Fallon](#), [The Maker's Diet by Jordan Rubin](#), [Why Your Child is Hyperactive by Ben Feingold](#)

Epsom Salt Baths

Epsom salt baths help a lot of special needs kids calm down and sleep better. There are a few different theories about how they work; I tend to think that these kids have a magnesium and/or sulfur deficiency that is corrected by absorbing the epsom salt (magnesium sulfate) through the skin. I like transdermal (through the skin) supplements when possible since the amount absorbed is relative to body size. To do the baths, use about a cup of epsom salts in warm water, have the child stay in the bath for at least 20 minutes, nightly or as needed. Epsom salts are found in the pharmacy section of most supermarkets or drug stores (Target, Walmart, Wallgreens, etc).

GFCF

The gluten-free casein-free diet is one of the more well known diets for special needs children. The theory with this diet is that the molecules gluten and casein are getting into the bloodstream without being digested properly, and are acting as toxins that affect the brain. While it is commonly said that you have to be on GFCF for weeks before you see a difference, often a dramatic change is seen within 48 hours of being GFCF. The strictness of this diet has to be emphasized, the strict avoidance of all gluten (wheat protein) and casein (milk protein), even 'down to the molecule' is essential for seeing results. Tip: To save money, stick with foods that are naturally gluten/casein free: Fruit, vegetables, meat, rice, potatoes, etc.

Recommended reading: [Special Needs Kids Eat Right by Judy Converse](#)

Amino Acids

Amino acid supplements as listed here have very minimal (if any) side effects. Particularly the amino acids L-Carnosine, dimethylglycine (DMG), and GABA are used in children with developmental issues (I would recommend trying one at a time). The controversy surrounding amino acid supplements primarily is if they are effectively crossing the blood-brain barrier or not. It looks like in some children they cross the barrier well and are effective, in others they are not. They help to promote eye contact, increase language, improve behavior, and prevent seizures if applicable.

SCD/GAPS

The *Specific Carbohydrate Diet* and *Gut and Psychology Syndrome* diet are based on the same theory. The theory is that many developmental and other psychological issues (like ADD, OCD, depression) and even nonpsychological issues such as eczema, digestive problems, and allergies are largely a product of poor establishment of the bacteria that reside in the digestive tract. The bacteria in the digestive tract normally function to digest certain nutrients, and fill holes in the gut wall to prevent undigested food from entering the bloodstream. In 'GAPS patients' the gut wasn't populated with the correct kinds of bacteria. In the case of not filling the gut wall in, undigested food leaks into the blood stream, causing the body to attack it as a foreign particle. In the case that 'bad' bacteria rather than 'good' bacteria populated the gut, these bacteria actually release toxins into the bloodstream, which affect the brain.

The diet works by taking away all complex carbohydrates and starches, so it starves off the bad bacteria, while the child also takes a probiotic to repopulate the gut with good bacteria to restore normal function. The diet removes all grains, sugar, and starches, as these are what feed the bad bacteria. Like GFCF, in order for this protocol to work correctly, 'fanatical adherence' is required, even down to watching the ingredients in supplements.

Unlike GFCF, this diet actually heals the underlying issue in the gut and is only required for a couple years, rather than for lifetime.

Recommended reading: [Gut and Psychology Syndrome by Natasha Campbell-McBride](#), [Breaking the Vicious Cycle by Elaine Gottschall](#), www.pecanbread.com