

Healthy Measures: Can food affect children's behaviour?

Have you ever wondered if sugar, artificial food colours or other food additives cause children to be over-active or "hyper"? Can food really affect your child's behaviour? Here's the scoop:

Sugary foods

You may have noticed that your child is over-active or "hyper" when there is a special occasion such as a birthday party, and wonder if this behaviour is related to eating too much sugar.

Research has found that sugary foods **do not** affect children's behaviour. Your child's over-active behaviour is probably caused by the excitement that comes with the celebration, for example the exciting games and activities at the birthday party.

Even though sugar doesn't affect children's behaviour, parents know that too much sugar isn't healthy for a variety of reasons:

- Foods high in sugar are often high in fat and calories and may replace the nutritious foods your child needs for growth and development
- Sticky, sugary foods can cause tooth decay

Food Additives

Research indicates that there may be a link between consuming mixtures of certain food additives, such as artificial colours and preservatives, and behaviour in children. Health Canada is proposing new food colour labelling regulations that will provide the public with the choice of avoiding specific food colours.

If you think a specific food ingredient is causing behavioural problems, you would need to test the relationship. Speak to a doctor or dietitian before attempting this on your own.

Caffeine

Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, cola beverages, energy drinks, chocolate and some medicines. Too much caffeine can cause irritability, nervousness, headaches, problems sleeping and behavioural problems. To learn more about sources of caffeine, check out [Clarifying the caffeine controversy](#).

If your child seems over-active or "hyper," make sure they:

- Have regular meal and snack times, including breakfast
- Eat a variety of foods from all four food groups from *Canada's Food Guide*
- Eat **more** fresh foods and **less** processed foods
- Have regular physical activity
- Avoid caffeine

For more information:

[Can food affect my child's behaviour?](#)

[Blast off with breakfast](#)

[Health Canada Proposal to Improve Food Colour Labelling Requirements](#)

Do you have questions on nutrition and healthy eating? Contact *EatRight Ontario* at 1-877-510-5102 to speak to a Registered Dietitian.

For more information, call York Region *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-252-9933.

Healthy Measures: Eat Well, Be Active and Be Yourself!