



School Counsellor Newsletter

Edition 39

Food for thought ... and wellbeing

In recent years a number of psychologists and nutritionists have highlighted the importance of making good food choices not only for one's physical health but also for one's mental health, emphasising that good nutrition can reduce stress and anxiety. Indeed, the message is that the choices you make for your diet, and the diet of your son, can have a significant impact on your mental wellbeing as well as your son's. Nutrition is not a specific area of my expertise so in this newsletter I share information from those who are promoting the important connection between food and mood.

Nutritionist, Bronwyn Hudson, stresses that our brain and our gut talk to each other a lot and that there is a strong connection between them. Therefore, if we don't look after our gut by thinking about what we are eating then we may not be looking after our brain. Clinical psychology professor, Julia Rucklidge, says that to be able to concentrate, have a stable mood and combat anxiety, we need to feed our brain properly as it regulates how we feel and cope. Both Hudson and Rucklidge recommend thinking about meal planning, being mindful of eating behaviours and food choices and being kind to ourselves through this process.

Here are some of Hudson and Rucklidge's recommendations:

- We need a range of vitamins and minerals in our diet, which mostly easily come from fruits, vegetables and unprocessed foods. Aim to have a diverse range of high fibre foods in your son's diet such as vegetables, legumes and wholegrains. This will help him to have a healthy gut, which will help his mental wellbeing. Let me add here that I have a son who really struggles to eat any kind of vegetable so I understand

that suggesting this is a lot easier than actually doing it! In our home, the goal is to try a range of new vegetables (and trying includes simply putting it to his lips or just putting his teeth into it for starters) and then slowly increasing the frequency of those vegetables he can tolerate - with a good dose of praise on the side!

- Keep sugar levels balanced - trying not to have too much or too little, for example when you skip a meal. Some ways to manage this for your son is to encourage him to eat regularly before getting too hungry which may lead to choosing a quick and easy high-sugar snack. By eating regularly, and choosing snacks such as an apple, nuts or seeds, sugar levels can be kept in check.
- Limit processed snacks. I am not suggesting that these are not part of your son's diet at all, but it is important to have conversations with your son about healthy food choices versus treat food choices, and that both are okay but the former needs to happen more than the latter. By making healthy food choices and having treats in moderation, your son is more likely to learn well, socialise well, play well, sleep well and feel well - all of which are key to his mental wellbeing.
- Encourage your son to think about how he eats - help him to take the time to stop, eat slowly and spend meal times with family or friends. You might want to include your son in shopping for food and cooking meals so that he can appreciate the whole process of food choices and eating beyond just grabbing something out of the pantry. Food has changed a great deal over the past ten years in terms of food colours, preservatives, emulsifiers and fast food - you might like to take the time to look at food packaging with your son so that you can both understand more fully what you are eating. You also might like to research mindful eating practices with your son.

I hope this newsletter has quite literally given you some food for thought. For more information from the two experts I have referred to in this article see:

- [Fuel your wellbeing: Bronwyn Hudson](#)
- [Nutrition and Mental health: Julia Rucklidge](#)



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If you wish to discuss the services the School Counsellor can provide, please see your son's homeroom teacher or Amos Pilgrim:

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