



Your Children are What They Eat! The Relationship Between Anxiety and Eating

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Under: Child Anxiety (<http://www.anxioustoddlers.com/category/anxiety-articles/>) / By: Tiffani Lawton

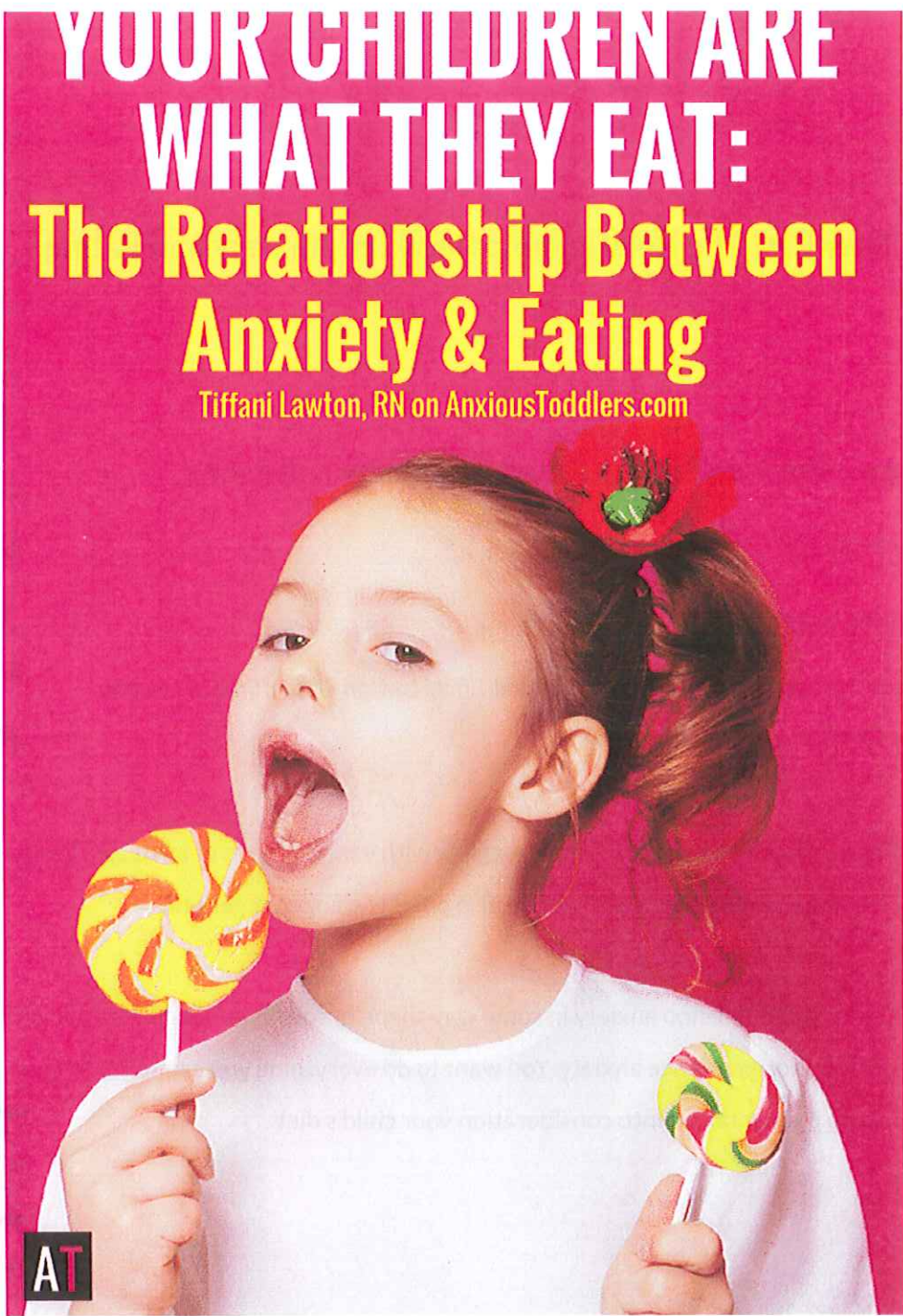
The Relationship Between Anxiety and Eating

Do you wonder if what your anxious child eats increases his or her anxiety? I invited Tiffani Lawton RN from Special-ism.com ([Http://www.special-ism.com](http://www.special-ism.com)) to shed some light between anxiety and eating.

Ever stop and wonder why we have an increasing number of children struggling with various forms of anxiety? We can contribute those rising numbers to various external stressors and we can also point the finger at genetics.

If mom or dad has anxiety, the child will most likely develop anxiety in some way shape or form. Let's consider that your child with anxiety has a genetic predisposition to experience anxiety. You want to do everything you can to try to keep that anxiety down to a minimum. You can do that by taking into consideration your child's diet.





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Let's talk about the relationship between anxiety and eating.

In a study published by the American Journal of Psychiatry, "A diet quality score was derived from answers to a food frequency questionnaire, and a factor analysis identified habitual dietary patterns. The 12-item General Health





assess current...anxiety disorders." (1)

"A "traditional" dietary pattern characterized by vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, and whole grains was associated with lower odds for...anxiety disorders. A "western" diet of processed or fried foods, refined grains, and sugary products was associated with a higher GHQ-12 score. There was also an inverse association between diet quality score and GHQ-12 score." (1)

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In a nutshell, this study is advising to eat more veggies, fruit, meat, fish and whole grains while eliminating processed and fried foods, refined grains and sugary products.



Anxiety and Eating: Foods to Avoid with Anxiety



Attractive and appealing foods for kids today are highly processed, loaded with preservatives and tapped out with sugar. If you want to try to abate symptoms of anxiety, consider eliminating or greatly limiting the following foods from your child's daily diet.



Caffeine

Ok, so your child may not be starting the day with a cup of joe, but did you know that many food items do contain caffeine? Here are a few to consider:

Protein or Snack Bars

Be sure to read the labels on these products. Clif Bars can serve up to 50 mg of caffeine. Zone Perfect's bars contain about 14.5mg. These amounts are comparable to drinking a small cup of coffee.

Soda

Coke is one carbonated beverage that is well known for containing caffeine. Did you know that Sunkist Orange Soda and Mountain Dew contain up to 41 mg of caffeine? Surge contains 69 mg of caffeine.





OTHER ARTICLES: [Teach your Child How to Fight Anxiety](#)

(<http://www.anxioustoddlers.com/how-to-fight-anxiety/>)

Ice Cream

Most popular brands of ice cream contain caffeine! Shocker, right? In fact, a large scoop contains upward to about 60 mg of caffeine – equivalent to 2 cans of Coke. Ben & Jerry's Coffee Heath Bar Crunch delivers 40 mg of caffeine. Coffee flavored items actually contain coffee.

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Candy Bars

Caffeine occurs naturally in cocoa beans. Most candy bars contain about 10 mg of caffeine. A half a cup of semi-sweet chocolate chips contains about 50 mg of caffeine. Chocolate also contains theobromine which is another member of the stimulant family.



Hot Chocolate

A wintertime favorite for kids. Sure, the sugar will have the kids bouncing off the walls but believe it or not, that cup of hot cocoa just may contain caffeine. Did you know that a tall hot chocolate from Starbucks serves up 20 mg of caffeine? I can hear you saying, "but the kids LOVE that hot chocolate after an afternoon of playing in the snow." That's ok – make your hot chocolate with Nesquik as they claim their chocolate powders are 99% caffeine free.

Vitamin Waters

At a glance, you may think this is a tasty way to get your kids the vitamins they need while maintaining hydration after a sport. Think again! Of course, any bottle that promotes itself as an energy booster will contain caffeine and other stimulants. Some of the Vitamin Waters have up to 50 mg per bottle! Avitae, a trendy 100% natural drink contains 125 mg of caffeine.

Other very surprising caffeine culprits may include sunflower seeds, nuts, frozen waffles, snack chips, beef jerky, marshmallows, jelly beans and gummy bears! Read your labels!





Most food additives are synthetic or of the man-made variety. They have been used for years to enhance the flavor and appearance of our foods. Some people’s bodies are just fine with this, but if you have a little one struggling with anxiety, you may wish to keep your eyes peeled for the following ingredients as these are huge triggers.

Aspartame

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This sweetener is used to replace sugar. If you are reading your labels, you may also see it noted as Sweetener 951. You may have already been trying to eliminate sugar from your child’s diet and switched over to sugar free alternatives as an option.



Researchers discovered back in 1994 that aspartame contributes to anxiety and other behavioral problems in children. (2) Aspartame can show up in places where you least expect it. Let’s say your child is chewing gum for calming sensory input. Ouch, it’s counter-productive if that gum contains aspartame.



OTHER ARTICLES: [Why the World Needs More Anxious Teens](#)

(<http://www.anxioustoddlers.com/world-needs-anxious-teens/>)

High Fructose Corn Syrup

This is found in most processed foods and can be a contributor to increased anxiety levels.

MSG

MSG is a flavor enhancer found in soups, dressings, snacks and frozen foods. MSG is an excitotoxin – it overexcites the consumer.

Food Dyes

The rainbow of synthetic food coloring is added to a lot of food products to enhance the appearance. Not only found in candies and cereals and the like, butchers at the supermarket are known for adding red dye to ground meats to keep the bright red color. Red #40 & Yellow #5 are known as nervous system disrupters that can increase symptoms of





Salt

Processed foods are high in sodium. Again, this makes the case for reading labels. If your family goes the whole foods route and avoids the processed foods, consider using a salt alternative to season your foods. Consider a product like Mrs. Dash. How is salt a problem? Salty food increases the blood pressure. This forces the heart to work a bit harder. When this happens, the body releases a stress hormone called adrenaline...which can increase anxiety levels.

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Sugar

Every parent knows all too well that sugar will make their kids bounce off the walls. It's hard with kids to completely eliminate sugars from their diets – it's like a childhood rite of passage. But, you can limit refined sugar intake and offer up sweetened yums as an occasional treat.



What happens after the body consumes sugar is there is a burst of energy. Then blood sugar levels drop – the crash. This crash cycle can contribute to anxiety. It is optimal to keep blood sugar levels even and avoid frequent irregularities. Why? Because the constant engagement of high sugar, low sugar back to high sugar pushes the body to release adrenaline and cortisol – stress hormones. These hormones can definitely create anxiety if not downright panic at times.

Anxiety and Eating: Foods that Help with Anxiety

Now that we took a peek at some serious dietary culprits, let's take a look at foods that will help to reduce anxiety levels.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids, the good fats found in oily fish like salmon, have been shown in countless studies to improve mood by lowering cortisol levels. Some other options include flaxseed oil, chia seeds, walnuts, soybeans and spinach.





chance that your child will consume foods rich in Omega-3's, definitely consider supplementing with an all natural over the counter supplement.

Chamomile Tea

Chamomile tea is a tried and true remedy to induce calm. "Warm drinks have a natural soothing effect in and of themselves. Take that soothing effect a step further and consider relaxing herbal teas as an alternative beverage. Use the calming herbal benefits and make home brewed iced tea." Lavender and Lemon Balm are also natural relaxers. More info on Omega 3's and Chamomile Tea can be found here (<http://special-ism.com/7-foods-reduce-kids-stress>).

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Complex Carbs

Go for the brown rice or whole grain bread. These changes will go a long way in reducing anxiety as they are rich in magnesium. When magnesium levels are running low, anxiety will rear its ugly head. Add green leafy vegetables like kale for more of a magnesium boost.

Complex carbs also contain tryptophan which converts to serotonin in the body. Serotonin is a mood regulator. Be sure to avoid the refined carbs and trade up to the brown carbs. Trade white rice for brown rice. Trade white bread for honey wheat bread.

Click here for more whole grain options. (<http://special-ism.com/eating-whole-grains-when-gluten-free/>)

Blueberries

These delicious little blue balls are considered a super food. They are rich in phytonutrients, vitamins and antioxidants – all help to decrease stress and anxiety. Pack your kiddo a bag of blueberries instead of chips! Make blueberry smoothies. The ideas are endless.

Asparagus





Asparagus contains the B vitamin, folic acid. Low folic acid levels can lead to increased anxiety. For more information about folic acid click here. (<http://special-ism.com/folate-deficiency-developmental-impact/>)

This list of do's and don't can be a bit overwhelming. Take baby steps. Pick one thing from the don't list and remove it or greatly limit it from your child's diet for 2 weeks. Take one thing from the do list and add it to your child's diet. Consider packing blueberries in their lunch or serve over their cereal in the morning. Keep a food journal. Write in the date that you eliminated one of the don't's and then make notes each day as to their anxiety levels. After two weeks, remove and add another option.

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References

- (1) <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/abs/10.1176/appi.ajp.2009.09060881>
- (2) <http://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJM199402033300501>

OTHER ARTICLES: [OCD in Children: Are you Missing the Signs?](#)

(<http://www.anxioustoddlers.com/ocd-in-children/>)

([Http://www.special-ism.com](http://www.special-ism.com))Tiffani Lawton, RN is the Editorial Director of Special-Ism.com ([Http://www.special-ism.com](http://www.special-ism.com)), an online magazine that offers solutions to a wide variety of isms. "Isms" is their coined term for childhood challenges. The goal of Special-ism is to help each child reach their potential through professional insights. Tiffani is the mother of 4 boys, all who are touched with anxiety in one way or another.

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