



How do I change my child's diet?

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So ..you've learned about why special diets can help with autism, ADHD, learning difficulties and behavioural challenges. You'd really like to see if it can help your child.

But..... You don't think you can do it. You really don't think there's any way you can change YOUR child's diet.

Maybe you're not confident in the kitchen or maybe your child is a very fussy eater or maybe your child only eats a few foods which will all need to be removed.

And that's why I can tell you with certainty, that diet changes can be successfully implemented.

Because I was you. And I did it.

With cooking skills extending all the way to packet cakes and an autistic child who ate only five foods (all of which had to go when I started dietary intervention), I managed to muddle my way through and make dietary intervention a huge success and in doing so I changed my son's life.

Dietary intervention is hard, challenging, time consuming, draining, and it's SO worth it. Changing diets is going to require all of your patience, energy, time and commitment but the possibilities for health and happiness that lay on the other side are more than worth the effort.

I hope the hints and tips in this Guide are helpful to ensure dietary intervention is a roaring success for your family.



Plan your alternatives. Before you begin, make sure you're very clear on the ingredients you can and can't have. Write down a list of your child's favourite foods and then next to that, what you will need to make it diet legal (for example if it's spaghetti, you can change from normal pasta to gluten free pasta).

Plan your meals. Once you've got your head around how you can make meals 'legal', sit down and write a meal plan. This will help you with your shopping and will ensure you're not panicking at 5pm scrambling around the kitchen trying to think of alternatives.

Remember you are dealing with an addict. Most children are craving the very foods that are making them sick and there will be a few days of tantrums as they withdraw. During this time, it's important to keep your end goal in mind. This is short term pain for long term gain.

Decide on the implementation plan that suits your family best. I suggest you choose one of three ways to implement the dietary changes :

1. **Cold Turkey.** This is where you throw away everything in the house that's no longer allowed and immediately begin serving diet legal alternatives for every meal or snack. This works well if you have a few days of time to spend on getting through the withdrawals and will mean the diet is implemented quickly. If you're going this way make sure you are well prepared with legal ingredients and have the stamina to see it through.
2. **One meal at a time.** This involves changing one meal (example dinner) to being completely diet legal while you keep breakfasts and lunch the same as they were. Once you have dinner mastered, you work on making breakfasts legal, then move onto snacks, then to lunches (I leave lunches til last as they are usually the trickiest to manage)
3. **One food group at a time.** This means if you are going gluten and dairy free for example, that you first work on making everything gluten free at the same time as you still have dairy in the diet. Once you're completely gluten free you move on to eliminating dairy.

Both 2 and 3 mean you will have a longer implementation period, but this isn't a race. You are better off taking a longer time to make changes you can stick to in the long term.

Be tricky. You will need to be one step ahead. Our kids are notorious for wanting things to look, smell and feel the same. Do what you need to do in order to make this work by disguising things so they are attractive to them. I even had to go to the point of getting empty packets from a fast food place and filling them with my own foods. I washed out old containers and filled them with home-made legal foods. I made everything I could into the shape of a plane because my son loved planes. Use your child's likes and obsessions to your advantage.

Have a solid reward system in place. You may need to form a behavioural plan around introducing new foods like you would for any other skill you are working on developing. Sticker charts, a special toy, extra time playing computer games – whatever it is your child will work for you can use as a reward. If you are working with other therapists, you can have them incorporate the new dietary strategies into their schedule so you are approaching this from all angles.

Don't start before you're ready. This is going to be a big commitment of your time and energy and I personally think you're better off delaying the implementation until you know you are in the right place to attack it whole heartedly. If you begin the diet and have to stop after a few days and then try again and stop again then you are going to find it much more difficult to implement than if you had waited until it was a good time to be able to commit to sticking to the changes no matter what.

Inform your family, friends and your child's carers about the dietary changes. You are going to need the support of all the people who are involved in your child's life to ensure they are on board. If you can tell them WHAT you are doing (ie what foods your child can and can't have) and WHY you're doing it, they will be more likely to support you. Dietary intervention has to be all or nothing – you can't be enforcing rules at home and have them eat illegal foods at school or at friend's houses. At the end of the day the key is communication with anybody else who spends time with your child. If you constantly provide information and alternatives in order to make it easy for them to adhere to your requests, you will find they will be much more likely to support you in making this do-able.

Involve your child as much as you can. If they are under three years old there's probably not a lot you can do in the way of involving them but after that age, the more you can include them in the shopping, preparation, cooking and serving of food the better. You can have them choose a recipe from a book that they'd like you to cook, or have them choose a new snack bar from the supermarket. You would be amazed at how gardening can transform kids, as they simply cannot wait to eat something they've grown themselves.

Don't get caught out. Carry food with you everywhere and stash legal snacks in bags and in the car. Send food ahead of time to school and relative's houses so that you are never caught unprepared and have to resort to eating something that's not diet legal.



Good luck! Although it seems like a monumental challenge, it can be done and with fantastic health benefits.

Please don't hesitate to visit my website and be in touch if you would like further assistance with implementing dietary changes for your family.