Transforming ATTENTION, CONCENTRATION AND BEHAVIOUR

Brought to you by The Whole Child

Thank you for accessing this guide. It has been created to help you and your child achieve your goals for improved health and harmony.

There are many natural solutions to attention, concentration and behaviour issues in children. However, it is a journey of discovery to find the most helpful things and ultimately take responsibility for nourishing your child's developing body, digestive system and brain.

Take a look at the pages to follow, try the recommendations and allow yourself some time to make changes — even making one change at a time is enough.

For some children, more intense strategies to bring healing within the body (in particular the gut) will be required to see results. If you would like a more in-depth, individualised consultation regarding these issues please feel free to contact The Whole Child to arrange a gut and psychology consultation and/or occupational therapy support.

7 FOODS FOR BETTER GUT HEALTH

Introduce these foods gradually to your child's diet. Keep focused on your goals and take one step at a time. Remember, progress is better than perfection.

Keeping a diary may help to track your child's wellbeing and behaviour.

Eggs

Eggs are incredible when it comes to healing the gut lining and nourishing the brain. Try to source the best quality eggs you can, as what the chickens eat does make a difference.

Include as many fresh, raw eggs in your child's food as possible per day. These can be added to smoothies, freshly made juice, soups and sauces.

Stir in a whole egg (the yolk nourishes the gut lining, helps with healing and sealing it, and is easily digested... while the white helps the body detox a range of things including mercury and other heavy metals).

TIP: If your child doesn't like the texture, you can just stir in the egg yolk as it will be less noticeable. Whites freeze beautifully and can be used for healthy macaroons or meringues. Even cooked eggs are fine (leave the yolk runny if you can).

ORGANIC FOOD

Organic food is ideal in order to reduce the load of toxins and chemicals but for many families it's not possible.

You can try growing food at home or visiting your local markets to buy in bulk but aim to just do the best you can. I've had the privilege of seeing families use foods for healing even when the budget and time weren't able to stretch to include organic options.

Once you have made the best choices you can, don't stress if things aren't perfect.

Fats

Butter, ghee, coconut oil, olive oil, lard and tallow are all calming fats. The brain is mostly made of fat and nerves are lined with myelin (also mostly made of fat) so calming fats are very important to help with attention, concentration, learning and behaviour.

For your first step, avoid cooking with or eating vegetable/canola/rice bran oils/margarine/spreadable butter.

Use butter (only real butter - the type that is hard when it's in the fridge), ghee or coconut oil. Olive oil is also excellent when added cold to a cooked meal/salad, or heated only moderately.

You can also ask your butcher for fat trimmings and make lard or tallow.

Aim to give as much fat as you can with a meal (you can have a bowl of cubed butter at the table to add extra fat). Eating good fats makes you less hungry (it won't make your child fat) and settles the mind. When your child is eating lean meat, always spread it with butter. When spreading butter on bread or meat, it needs to be thick enough you can see teeth marks.

TIP: We recommend you only buy Australian brands of olive oil with the packing date on the bottle/container e.g. Cobram Estate. Other olive oils have been shown to be diluted with other vegetable oils. Olive oil is best added at the end of cooking to preserve the micronutrients.

Extra Virgin Coconut Oil

This healthy fat is calming and settling. It provides the brain with a unique fuel source that can support healing and development in brain cells.

Including 2-3 tablespoons of coconut oil for a child each day spread out over the day can bring the body into a ketosis state (which encourages neurological healing) more of the time. This state means that the body is burning fat for fuel rather than glucose for fuel. Coconut oil alone has been shown to bring the body into a state of ketosis for about 8 hours after consumption, so spread out your doses.

You can dissolve coconut oil into a warm drink or a smoothie, cook with it or make 50/50 honey/coconut oil frozen ice cubes for a treat. Some children will accept taking it off a spoon and washing it down with a drink.

TIP: We recommend starting with 1-3 teaspoons a day and gradually increasing until it is well tolerated. If any digestive symptoms emerge, drop back for a little while and try increasing the dose again in a few weeks.

Cod Liver Oil

It is well-documented that oils from fish are beneficial for our brains. However, commercially produced fish and cod liver oil are stripped of nutrients, and often have synthetic vitamins added back in.

There are some excellent fermented and fresh cod liver oils that are made with more traditional processes preserving the nutrients. Some brands we recommend are:

- Green Pastures
- Rosita's
- Nutrapro
- Melrose

TIP: If your child can't take the taste of cod liver oil, try to include wild caught fish In their diet as often as possible (you can make fish broth with the head/carcass and add it to sauces or chowder).

Meat Stocks and Bone Broths

Deeply nourishing and healing for the gut lining, meat stocks and bone broths are cheap and easy to make.

Meat stock has lower levels of naturally occurring glutamate so is very gentle and healing. To prepare it, use meaty bones or a whole chicken and cover with water. Add Himalayan salt, apple cider vinegar, and any vegetables/garlic/herbs you like. Bring to a boil. Skim froth from the top (throw this out). Cook for 1 hour for fish, 1-2 hours for chicken, and 3-4 hours for beef/lamb.

Bone broth: Although this is more mineral rich, this can aggravate inflammation where the gut lining is permeable and inflamed. If you notice any reactions, stick to meat stock until more healing has occurred. To make bone broth, ask the butcher for big marrow/joint bones cut to fit in your biggest pot. Add these to cold water, with a good dose of apple cider vinegar and Himalayan salt and vegetables/garlic/herbs of your choice. Leave it to sit for an hour. Turn the heat on and bring to boil. Skim the froth from the top, then bring the temp to low and cook for 24 - 72 hrs (min 12 hrs). After straining you'll have a mineral rich, gelatinous healing broth.

Calming Cordials

The microorganisms in apple cider vinegar can help with the gut microflora, and good quality honey encourages beneficial microflora while discouraging the less healthy ones.

Mix apple cider vinegar with honey (about a dessert spoon of each). Mix till dissolved and then add water (and ice if you like). Add more honey if it's not sweet enough. On a hot day, it's so refreshing that your kids won't even care that it is good for them!

You can get apple cider vinegar from the health food store or organics store - you have to get the really natural one with the "mother" in it.

Look for real honey, local and raw if possible. Commercial honey can be diluted with water and glucose syrup with no labelling.

Probiotics

Probiotics have a crucial impact on behaviour and concentration.

Natural probiotics are very important, with as many meals as possible (e.g. homemade kefir, water kefir, kombucha, sauerkraut or pickled veggies).

You can learn to make these over time. Resources such as Pickl'it Jars can be very helpful in making things like sauerkraut.

Other fermented foods don't require any special equipment. Commercial probiotics may be helpful in rebalancing the gut microflora.

TIP: When buying probiotic foods ensure to purchase foods from the refrigerated section (otherwise they'll be pastuerised which destroys the beneficial microflora). Avoid ingredients like sugars, sucrose, glucose, aromas and natural flavours.

WHAT TO AVOID

Processed foods and sugar

It sounds extreme... but this is where the rubber hits the road!

There are many hidden ingredients in processed foods that have a detrimental effect on a child's mental and emotional health, right down to the cellular level.

Many of these are unlabelled or can be labelled in confusing ways. Trans fats are also in most processed foods and have a detrimental effect neurologically.

Don’t be lured by “natural flavours” – while they might be derived from natural sources these have been processed, and can contain artificial chemicals, making them equivalent to artificial flavours.

You are trying to feed and heal a damaged gut and brain… so your child needs real food made from fresh ingredients!

Making this step will very likely bring about quite significant progress to a child who feels calmer and therefore more confident.

If it feels too scary to remove the food your child is used to all at once, keep working towards the other steps and gradually ditch and switch foods from your pantry. You can make progress over a few months.

YUM FOR LITTLE TUMS! EASY FOOD IDEAS

Start with these ideas and check the end of this guide for some books that will give you more inspiration.

BREAKFAST IDEAS:

- Smoothies
- Eggs & avocado
- Leftover meat and vegetables
- Natural yoghurt (Greek yoghurt with no milk solids is best; try Mungalli Greek Yoghurt with some honey, fruit and nuts

LUNCH & DINNER IDEAS

Keep it simple Mumma!

- Meat
- Chicken
- Eggs
- Vegetables

SNACKS

- Fruit
- Nuts
- Cheese

SWEETENERS

Instead of regular sugar, use honey, organic maple syrup, coconut sugar or rapadura sugar.

It takes a little getting used to, but these sweeteners are mineral-rich and healthy. They won't deplete the body in the same way regular sugar does and they don't lead to sugar cravings (sometimes caused by mineral/chromium depletion associated with processed sugars).

GETTING BACK TO BASICS WITH YOUR LIFESTYLE

YOUR WELLBEING

Parents of children with attention and concentration difficulties will know that it seems to be contagious.

Spending time with a hyperactive and impulsive child who flits from one thing to another can leave you feeling frazzled and having difficulty focusing and completing tasks.

We can use this awareness to work the other way and bring back some basic principles to foster a lifestyle that is calming, grounded, and intentional. Making changes as a family changes the atmosphere and lifts everyone's ability to be fully engaged in daily life.

SCREEN TIME

As time goes on, we're learning more about the detrimental impacts of screen exposure on developing brains. We, as parents, are still learning how to navigate our children's exposure to screens and how to parent children and teens who yearn for screen time.

The more we learn, the more we see that our efforts in this area are critical. Evidence shows that the impact on the brain is clear and spending a lot of time gaming or looking at a screen has a similar impact on the brain to taking drugs. Not only that, we're training young brains to pay attention to fleeting scenes and intense inputs. As a result, they struggle to focus on regular, real-life experiences.

Every family is unique and this issue will need to be considered as a family. Firstly, adults need to shine a spotlight on their own screen behaviour. Once you have made a commitment to setting the right example, look towards supporting your family and children to develop self-control and acceptable boundaries that work for your household.

Some helpful ideas include:

- No screens in bedrooms
- Screen time limits checked and monitored (this can be done as a family with everyone noticing how much time they are spending staring at their screen and what activities seem to suck their time away).
- Evening switch off times
- Completing all morning routines before checking screens
- Checking screens at set intervals each day as well as complete breaks.

We love the routine of 1 day of a week, 1 weekend per quarter, and 1 week off screens and devices a year.

Other factors associated with screens can also have an impact, for example, the impact of electromagnetic fields.

Simple strategies to reduce the impact include turning off the Wi-Fi router and all Wi-Fi-emitting devices at night (including smart TVs), using battery-powered alarm clocks, connecting your computer to the internet via wired connection, and avoiding wireless keyboards and mice.

EXERCISE AND MOVEMENT

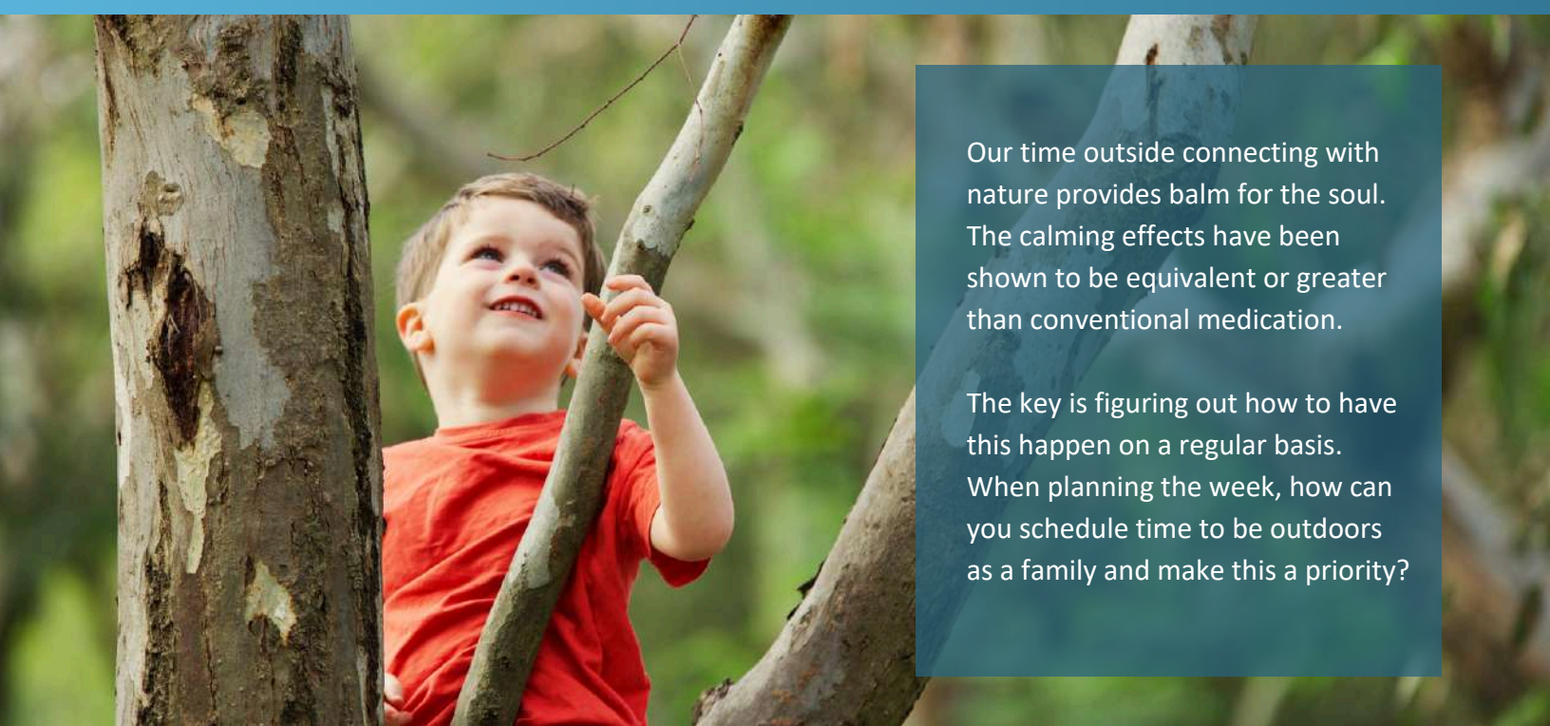
Taking better control in this area can have a huge impact on attention and concentration.

It's just a matter of finding what activities your child will be willing to engage in regularly and what seems to give the "just right" input for neurological calming.

For some children, adding running to their routine works wonders. For others, heavy work tasks provide much-needed input.

The main thing to be aware of is that children who are moving a lot and appear hyperactive are showing you that they need a lot more intensive, targeted and proactive movement in their daily routines.

TIME OUTSIDE



Our time outside connecting with nature provides balm for the soul. The calming effects have been shown to be equivalent or greater than conventional medication.

The key is figuring out how to have this happen on a regular basis. When planning the week, how can you schedule time to be outdoors as a family and make this a priority?

BOARD GAMES

One of our favourite therapy tools is good old-fashioned board games. We find they build connection, concentration, resilience and the ability to solve complex problems. Keep searching for the games that your family enjoys most. Don't be disheartened by sibling rivalry or the emotions associated with losses. Key life lessons about resilience and persistence come from these experiences.

ROUTINES, RITUALS AND PREDICTABILITY

My confession as a Mum is that I've always found routines hard. However, over time, I've seen they are the gateway to harmony in our household.

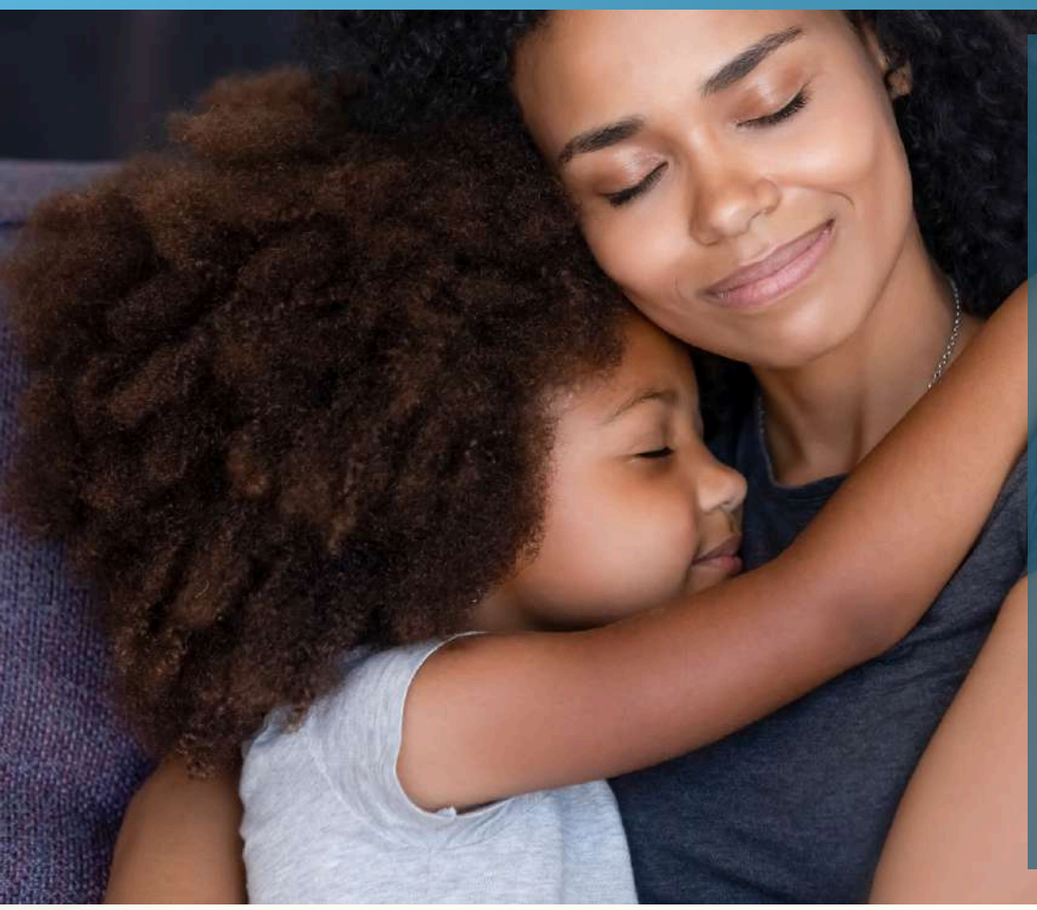
Having predictable morning, afternoon and evening routines (with visual schedules if needed) means that everyone has lots of opportunity to practice tasks, be supported in them, cope with the mundane, and all enjoy the benefits of a home that is more organised.

EXTENDING THE FOCUS

Make efforts where you can to disrupt the impulse to flit from task to task by teaching habits like packing up a task when done. You'll most likely need to be involved in completing the task, but bringing a child back, helping do just a little more of an activity and then helping them pack up reminds them of what they were focused on before they became distracted.

It might sound like "Oh it looks like you're finished playing with your Lego. Would you like me to help find another piece or two before we pack it away? And now let's pack up together before we move on to playing with the cars."

CONTAGIOUS CALM



It takes practice… quite possibly decades of practice if I'm anything to go by. But "calm response" has become my daily mantra.

The more intentional you are able to become about keeping your voice calm, your responses calm and your movements calm the more you create a calm atmosphere.

MAGNESIUM

Magnesium deficiency is often associated with attention, concentration and behaviour problems.

There are a range of ways to increase magnesium levels and the best solution for your child will depend on their needs. For some children with chronic constipation, particular forms can be more beneficial. For others it is more readily absorbed in drops.

Epsom salts (magnesium sulphate) baths, magnesium chloride baths, or sprays/creams can also help.

Other biochemical imbalances such as nutrient deficiencies & neurotransmitter/amino acid imbalances can affect attention and concentration. These may require further exploration.

MASSAGE FOR THAT HEALING TOUCH

Sharing positive, healthy touch can have far-reaching benefits in the family. Allow this to become something you share and enjoy together (rather than something you "do" to your child). Invite your child to also offer massage for you, siblings or grandparents so that it is truly shared. This builds an atmosphere of nurturing, caring, connection and fun.

Let your own natural caring touch shine through. There are simple massage techniques you can learn, or you can follow your instincts. Deep, firm strokes tend to be very calming and can also help the organisation of the nervous system (through stimulation of the sensory homunculus, switching off the pain/temperature/light touch pathways and calming the amygdala).

Use a base oil like coconut oil or sweet almond oil. Adding essential oils will bring further benefits of nature and healing. Some essential oils that are great for attention, concentration and calming are Cedarwood, Frankincense, Vetiver, Lavender, Peppermint, Chamomile, Ylang Ylang, Sweet Orange and Melissa. Have your child help you choose some oils and make their own massage oil blend.

RECOMMENDED READING

For more information, I recommend diving into these books:

- **Gut and Psychology** Syndrome by Dr. Natasha Campbell-McBride
- Life Changing Food by Jo Whitton & Fouad Kassab
- Healing Foods by Sandra Ramacher
- The Heal Your Gut Cookbook by Hilary Boynton & Mary Brackett
- Nourishing Traditions by Sally Fallon
- Real Food by Nina Planck
- **Digital Cocaine** – A Journey Toward iBalance by Brad Huddleston
- **Raising Tech-Healthy Humans:** How to reset your children's tech-habits and give them a great start to life" by Daniel Sih.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Crystel Poggioli

Occupational Therapist
Certified Gut and Psychology Syndrome (GAPS) Practitioner

The Whole Child Founder Crystel Poggioli had an interest in naturopathy prior to beginning a career in occupational therapy. As her worlds gradually merged, she created her Atherton occupational therapy clinic to support practitioners and families who want to explore every option available to improve childhood development and wellbeing.

Crystel applies her knowledge of occupational therapy and her practice as a Gut and Psychology Syndrome (GAPS) expert to guide children to achieve milestones and overcome developmental challenges. Her business was created to bridge the gap between mainstream and natural health approaches, taking a multi-faceted approach to improve development and wellbeing.

Visit

www.thewholechild.com.au

The Whole Child

to find out more.