Your child needs a healthy brain. You can make sure they have one by feeding them the right foods and not feeding them foods that harm their brain.

The nerves in your brain are made mostly out of fat. When you eat foods that have the wrong fats, it harms your brain.

What are the wrong fats? Ones that are high in an oil called omega-6. Eating foods with a lot of omega-6 leads to lots of problems: obesity, depression, aggression, and heart disease. You can help your children (and yourself) prevent all these problems by making sure that you all eat foods that are low in omega-6 and high in another oil—omega 3.

**Good Brain Food**

You don’t need to be chemist to know what to feed them. Here are foods your kids should eat more of because they have lots of omega-3:

- Fish (good examples: salmon, anchovies, tuna)
- Nuts (good examples: flaxseed, walnuts, butternuts)
- Vegetables (good examples: radishes, broccoli, spinach, cauliflower)

Research has shown that when you increase intake of good brain food, it can prevent obesity, aggression, heart disease, and depression. If you get your kids started eating good brain food, they could live longer, be happier, and have less conflict in their lives.

**Bad Brain Food**

The bad news is that a lot of foods that kids are used to eating aren’t good for their brains. Read the labels on most processed foods and you will see that they have oils that are high in the bad brain food, omega 6.

Here are oils to avoid:
- Cottonseed, corn oil, safflower/sunflower, and canola oils

Here are some foods high in the bad brain food, omega 6:
- Hamburgers,
- French fries,
- Other fried foods,
- Most processed foods.
- Packaged snacks,
- Store bought cookies and other sweets,
- School lunches,
- Meals from fast food places

On the other side of this tip sheet, we give more specifics about how you can increase your child’s good brain food and decrease brain food that harms them.
Things You Can Do To Make Sure Your Child Is Getting Good Brain Food

• Serve your child any kind of fish. Salmon, anchovies, tuna, sardines, trout, and crab are especially good. If you can increase these to 2-3 times a week, that would be a good thing.

• Feed them broccoli, cauliflower, and spinach because they contain substances that the body converts to good brain oils. And, such vegetables decrease craving of the bad oils.

• Reduce your child’s consumption of foods high in bad brain food. Processed foods made with any of the following should be avoided: soybean, cottonseed, sunflower, safflower or corn oils.

Here foods that are NOT good for good brain development:
  o Hamburgers,
  o French fries,
  o Other fried foods,
  o Packaged snacks,
  o Store bought cookies and other sweets,
  o School lunches,
  o Meals from fast food places

• Use only olive oil. You can use non-virgin olive oil for most high-temperature cooking, and extra-virgin olive oil for most anything else like salad dressing. Olive oil is at the heart of the Mediterranean diet that is proven to improve all measures of health and wellbeing. Olive oil contains NO omega-6, the bad oil.

• Canola oil is the least bad of the vegetable oils, but it is probably better to use more olive oil instead.

• A simple and relatively inexpensive way to increase good brain food is to prepare tuna 2-3 times per week. If you use canned tuna, be sure to buy the kind that is packed in water or olive oil—NOT other vegetable oils like soybean, corn or cottonseed oil. If your child likes tuna salad, substitute fat-free mayonnaise or sandwich spread or one made with olive oil.

• Occasional fish sticks aren’t bad, but they really don’t have much of the good omega-3. In fact, the breading and frying can actually swamp out any of the good fish oils. It is better to switch sautéing or baking white fish in olive oil.

• Consider having your child take some fish oil, capsules or liquid. This is a good start. Current science suggests that your child probably needs more. Most American adolescents will need to take 1 to 2 full grams of omega-3 per day. Remember, grandmothers all over Europe and North America used to make kids take cod liver oil, for very good reason. Fortunately, the gel caps or flavored oil make this a lot easier. Unless your child eats more than 3 servings per week of tuna, salmon, trout or other oily fish, chances are that your child will benefit from additional omega-3.

Be Patient

Even if you are successful in changing your child’s daily diet toward more good brain food and less bad brain food, the change won’t be instant. It may take several months to see the effects.