

Is there an affect between Diet and SM?

By Dr Elisa Shipon-Blum
CEO & Exec Medical Director SMG~CAN
Director: SM Anxiety Research and Treatment Center
www.selectivemutism.org
SMinfo@selectivemutism.org

To date, there are no formal studies to prove or disprove that diet has an affect on Selective Mutism. Infact, there have been no formal studies to access the neurological effects within the peripheral and central nervous system. We can only assume for now.

IE. What percentage of children with SM actually get rapid heart rates, sweaty palms, feel dizzy, get stomach aches, feel nauseous, etc. From working with many children, it is obvious that quite a few manifest anxious symptoms at times. IE. Nervous tummy aches, etc. However, the exact %'s and the specific symptoms have not been formally studied. This would indeed be a wonderful study to do one day!

However, if one were to examine the affects of diet on anxiety as a whole, perhaps we can apply some of the concepts to our children whom suffer in silence. For anxious individuals, the mere feeling of a rapid heart rate or sense of dizziness can cause the individual to enter into an anxious state. Their bodies sense anxiety, therefore the mind follows in acting out the part! I.e. If a child eats a lot of chocolate, gets wound up, heart rate goes up and the body senses anxiety, the mind therefore takes over and feelings of anxiety often prevail. We know this is fact for individuals with panic disorder, but this has not been studied with SM children.

Below is a guide to a more stress-free way of life. The effects on SM are obviously not studied, but these recommendations can only help our anxious children.

A diet High in Complex carbohydrates has calming effects by increasing the amount of tryptophan the precursor to serotonin in the brain. Complex carbs, such as potatoes, wholewheat bread and pasta, take longer to digest than sugary simple carbs like white bread, so you stay fuller longer and your blood sugar is likely to stay steady, eliminating stress and anxiety. Eat carbs without fat or protein to feel instant contentment, but note that a balanced diet needs protein and fat as well.

Meats and high protein diets are somewhat taxing on the digestive system. Takes a lot of 'effort' to digest, often causing an increase in secretion of the adrenal hormones, Ie. Cortisol. As a result, heart rates may increase giving a 'sensation of anxiety.'

Milk and dairy products may cause digestive issues in some. For some of our anxious children who get the 'tummy aches' having added dairy may exacerbate the 'gas and bloating.

Limit or eliminate consumption of:

Simple Sugars that cause rapid rises in insulin and cause more rapid fluctuations in blood sugar. For some this causes mood swings and feelings of uneasiness/anxiety.

Ie, chocolate, sodas , cakes, cookies and candy products.

In regard to vitamins and herbs:

B –Vitamins, specifically B-6 which helps manufacture serotonin in the brain, have had positive effects on reducing anxiety.

Herbal remedies, such as like kava-kava, valerian, St. John's Wort and chamomile are known to help adults with anxiety. However, because herbs are not FDA approved, studies have not proven their overall safety, 'ability to work' and effectiveness in children. Be sure to check with your doctor before using any of these, particularly on younger children.

In addition to above, children should:

-- drink plenty of water to flush out toxins and to enable for adequate hydration. When dehydrated, individuals often develop fatigue, headaches, rapid heart rates and anxious feelings.

--Be involved in Regular physical exercise which reduces anxiety by relieving muscle tension, reducing blood pressure and produces endorphins and feelings of euphoria and calmness.

--Get plenty of rest and relaxation- Adequate sleep is known to boost immunity and lower internal stress levels.

Obviously, the recommendations above can have an impact on a child's well-being; however, to effectively overcome SM and all anxieties, the child needs to be involved in a behavioral treatment programmed designed to:

Reduce anxiety, build self esteem and increase social confidence and communication comfort. In addition, there needs to be a team approach consisting of the child, parent, school and treating professional who all work together to enable for treatment progress.

Copyright 2003 by Dr. Elisa Shipon-Blum and
Selective Mutism Research and Treatment Center
All Rights Reserved

Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission From Dr. Elisa Shipon-Blum is prohibited
Contact: 215-887-5748 or smarc@selectivemutism.org