

## Special Diets and Nutritional Supplements for Children with ASD.

There are many “Special diets” and supplements promoted for children with ASD. Below is a guide to the safest, most effective and practical options.

Intervention	Why	Risks	Other Comments
Milk (casein) exclusion	Produces morphine like substance: can effect mood, sleep or health. Often referred to as “intolerance”. Not the same as an allergy.	Milk products are a major calcium source. They also provide iodine (also found in eggs and fish) and protein (found in meat, fish, eggs, beans, nuts and pulses)	Sometimes soya products or goat & sheep milk / cheese tolerated. Other calcium fortified milk substitutes are made from rice, oats, or nuts.
Gluten exclusion	As above	Some “wholewheat” foods provide valuable fibre. Without fibre, there are risks of constipation and poor blood sugar control. Make sure of enough fibre elsewhere in diet.	May need to avoid barley and rye. Oats maybe OK if labelled as gluten free.
Food additive exclusion	Some have been shown to worsen mood and concentration	None	No need to avoid all E numbers. <b>“Food additive sheet”</b> is available. Specific colourings, preservatives and sweeteners are the main problem
Other exclusions	Various substances like phenols, salicylates and amines can cause physical or behavioural intolerance	Could take too many foods out of the diet just in case of intolerance. Foods containing these substances are <b>very</b> nutritious.	Most common causes of reaction are oranges, tomatoes tea & bananas. Sometimes also children also apples, berries, and peppers.
Healthy, well balanced diet	Use the <b>“Eatwell Plate”</b> as a guide. What’s good for the body is good for the brain.	Easier said than done for some children! Requires patience and modelling. See <b>“Guidance on managing selective eating”</b>	Green vegetables, high fibre starchy foods, some oily fish, some beans and pulses, a little red meat and very little added sugar or high sugar foods.
Vitamin & mineral supplement	Some have key roles in brain and poor intakes are common. Eg: Iron, Zinc, Magnesium and folic acid.	All nutrients have a “safe upper limit” beyond which they can be dangerous. Nutrients in food are better absorbed.	Useful “safety net” especially for a child with a poor diet. An information sheet is available: <b>“Supplements needed depending on diet”</b> .
Omega 3 supplement	May improve mood, sleep, attention or health in general.	Very few except for very high doses. May lead to increased risk of bruising	250 to 1000 mg per day, depending on diet and age of child. Children with raised red bumps on arms, high levels of thirst, dull hair and weak nails may be showing signs of omega 3 deficiency.
Vitamin D supplement	Important for healthy bones. May improve mood. May reduce a wide range of health risks.	Few risks unless on very high dose. If aiming to increase vitamin D levels through sun exposure, care to avoid burning. However, spend <b>some</b> time without sunscreen in sun.	Opinion varies on dose for children. 7.5 to 25 micrograms per day for young children, up to 50 micrograms per day for teenagers & adults.