

# Growing up SMART

## WHAT KIDS NEED FOR OPTIMUM LEARNING

**Brain food** - a good diet and pure drinking water.

**Down time** - plenty of sleep, a relaxing bedtime routine.

**Brain power** - physical and mental stimulation. Puzzles, playing games, taking music lessons, joining a chess club.

**Emotional wellness** - show kids positive self talk so they can work through emotions and recognise feelings.

**Super supplements** - vitamin D for healthy bones and a strong immune system, and omega-3 fish oils for boosting brain power.

**We are what we eat and this is true of children too. So how can you make sure your little ones are getting everything they need, and should you give them supplements?**

**A**ccording to the National Healthy Eating Guidelines, every day children over five should eat six or more servings of cereals, bread and potatoes; five servings of fruit and vegetables; three servings of milk, cheese and yogurt; two servings of meat, fish, eggs, beans and nuts; two of spreads and oils; leaving cakes, sweets, fizzy drinks and processed foods to be eaten only sparingly.

Ruth Charles, a paediatric dietitian with the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute says, "Children and teens can get all the nutrients they require from the many natural food sources that a balanced diet contains."

Dr Keri Marshall is a licensed naturopathic doctor who specialises in paediatrics and is Chief Medical Officer of Nordic Naturals. "Children differ in their nutritional needs just as adults do, but there are some standard vitamins and minerals that just about all kids benefit from," she explains. "These include omega-3 essential fatty acids, vitamin C, calcium, vitamin D, magnesium, zinc, iron, and B vitamins. The best way to get these is through a healthy and balanced diet; this means eating wholefoods rather than processed foods."

According to Dr Marshall the Western diet can lead to some serious nutritional deficiencies. "As fish has gradually receded from the dinner plate, and an abundance of refined oils have made their way into most processed foods, our diets have begun to contain too much



omega-6 (pro-inflammatory) and too little omega-3 (anti-inflammatory)."

"For brain health in particular, the omega-3 DHA is crucial," says Dr Marshall. "DHA makes up 20% of the fatty acids of the brain's cerebral cortex, the large outer layer that is responsible for functions like attention, memory and language."

The importance of vitamin D has been in the news a lot recently. "Today, 74% of adults in Ireland get less than half the recommended daily level of vitamin D and 88% of Ireland's primary school children are not meeting the daily recommended Vitamin D levels," says Dr Marshall. "At its most extreme, vitamin D deficiency manifests itself as rickets in children."

"Very few foods contain a natural source of vitamin D," says Ruth Charles. "The flesh of fatty fish and fish liver oils are among the best sources. Vitamin D is often added to milk and breakfast cereals but

not always in its active form. For those unable to meet their daily vitamin D requirement it's probably wise to consider a supplement."

"Ireland's lack of sun is certainly good reason to supplement with vitamin D," says Dr Marshall. "If supplementing, look for a good quality fish oil that contains vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol), which is the natural form of this vitamin, and is more easily absorbed by the body."

Irish Food Allergy Network  
[www.ifan.ie](http://www.ifan.ie)

Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute  
[www.indi.ie](http://www.indi.ie)

[www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)  
- for food pyramids

**Check with your professional healthcare practitioner before you give children vitamin or mineral supplements.**

**Your local health store is a good source of information on supplements.**