

Exclusion Diets for Kids with Restrictive Eating and Neurodevelopmental Disorders

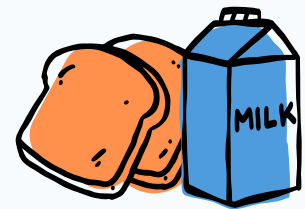


We know that families want to do everything they can to support the health of their child with a neurodevelopmental disorder (NDD), like Autism and ADHD. Many parents ask about special diets, such as exclusion diets, because they wonder if it may help improve their child's development.

What are exclusion diets?

Exclusion diets are diets that take away a certain type of food.

One type of exclusion diet is a gluten-free, casein-free (GFCF) diet. This is a diet that excludes all foods that contain gluten (e.g., bread), or all foods that contain casein (e.g., milk and cheese), and sometimes both.



Why do people try exclusion diets?

Some doctors or dietitians may suggest an exclusion diet for intolerances like celiac disease or lactose intolerance. If you are noticing symptoms in your child that make you wonder if they have a condition like this, talk to your doctor.

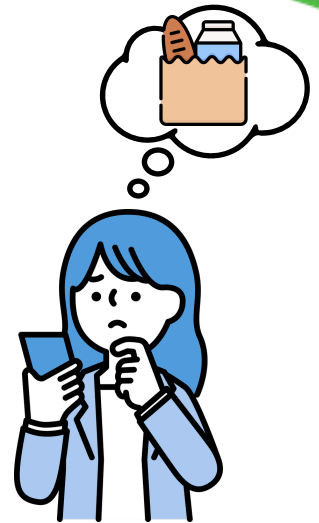


What are the risks of a GFCF diet?

Kids with NDD may have selective or restrictive eating, and may only eat a small number of foods. If they follow an exclusion diet, like a GFCF diet, and have restrictive eating, they may not get enough of the nutrients their bodies need to develop. Cutting out food groups can cause serious problems like poor growth and stress around eating. These risks are higher when diets are started without help from a doctor or dietitian.

But I've seen people on social media say this works!

You may have seen videos or posts online of families that try an exclusion diet hoping it will improve the symptoms of their child's NDD. Some people may think that some symptoms of their child's NDD changed when they tried this diet, but it was likely an underlying condition that improved, not the NDD. Large, well-designed studies have found no proof that exclusion diets change autism, ADHD, or other NDDs. Unfortunately, exclusion diets **may cause harm** to kids who already have selective or restrictive eating, **so it is always best to consult a doctor before changing your child's diet.**



When to talk to your doctor

Talk to your doctor if your child is...



- Having ongoing problems with constipation or diarrhea
- Having an upset tummy after eating (holding stomach, crying)
- Extremely tired or showing big changes in their energy levels
- Losing weight
- Not eating a lot of food or eating a very limited range of foods
- Not eating a balanced diet
- Not drinking

You can find resources on our website that you may find helpful, like our “How to Talk to Your Doctor” tip sheet, and other tips on supporting and motivating your child in trying new foods.

This handout is part of the NDD Restrictive Eating Clinic Information Series:
www.hollandbloorview.ca/RestrictiveEatingInfo



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