

FAQs and Facts about FAS

By Shannon Askew
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A colleague asked me the other day if any research has been done on FAS children and nutrition. Probably somewhere, but I'm not aware of any specific study. Your best bet for nutritional information would be any book by Anne Streisguth. What we need to remember is that any information we have on healthy nutrition and lifestyles for children applies even more so to the FAS child. We know from numerous studies that young children who eat breakfast do better in school than young children who do not. Many hot lunch programs in inner city schools in the U.S. and Canada were started to counteract the poor academic performance of hungry kids. For some kids this was the only hot meal (or the only meal) of the day. An empty stomach compromises the learning of children without brain damage. For the FAS impaired brain, food is vitally important.

Glucose (a form of sugar) is brain food, and your brain cannot function without it. Glucose is made from complex carbohydrates (bread, pasta, rice, vegetables). Glucose is stored in the body and released as energy when needed for the brain or the muscles. Without enough stored glucose, or an efficient system of accessing the glucose, the brain does not function properly. How about yourself? Can you think straight when you are overtired, or sick? Do you make good decisions under emotional stress? Of course not. Now think about the FAS brain with damaged or missing parts, and maybe reduced intelligence, that does not work very well in the first place. If the FAS brain does not get enough food/energy, which is glucose, then this brain will not work properly. The FAS brain does not work very well at any time, so poor nutrition only compounds the problem.

Now because glucose is a form of sugar, do not make the mistake of thinking that eating or drinking sweet things will make up for not eating properly. Sucrose, the white sugar that we cook with and put in coffee and candy, is pure energy. Yes, this sugar converts to glucose too, but the conversion happens so fast that the glucose cannot be stored properly. The result is elevated blood sugar levels and the "high" we can get from sugar. Any parent with a hyperactive child will tell you all about the relationship between candy bars and temper tantrums. The elevated blood sugar levels also put a strain on the pancreas to produce insulin, to help absorb the sugar. The insulin rushes around to get rid of the sugar, and the blood sugar level drops again. This can cause a minor depression in the body system, and a cranky whiny child. There is also a direct relationship between sugar consumption and diabetes, so too much sugar is not good for your child in any case.

A healthy diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, grains, and milk is the best diet for any child, and therefore the best diet for your FAS child who needs all the help she can get to function properly at home or school. Consult your doctor, local health nurse, naturopath or the Canada Food Guide for further information.

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