



Feeding the Gut Microbiome: New Hope for Autism

Shared by Valerie Southgate *Msc MFA CMPP*

It's long been known that many children with ASD experience gastrointestinal issues. Evidence shows that their gut microbiome composition often differs from that of typically developing children, and may be part of the problem.

- The gut microbiome refers to the trillions of bacteria living in our digestive systems.

The good news is that by feeding the gut microbiome with good food, you can improve both digestive symptoms and some behavioral aspects of autism.

It's why we encourage our learners to "eat healthy food that's good for your friendly belly bugs so that your little friends can help you be strong, smart, and happy".

These fun activities will help you at home.

1. Variety's the Spice of Life

Encourage your child to think of their plate of food as a colourful adventure. The more different plants they eat, the happier their belly bugs will be.

Have Your Child Take a Fun Food Challenge. Try eating three new fruits or vegetables each week.

- Look for something completely new or something they haven't had in a while. Maybe some purple sweet potato or sugar snap peas?



We see this snack box sent to school and we see love and caring.

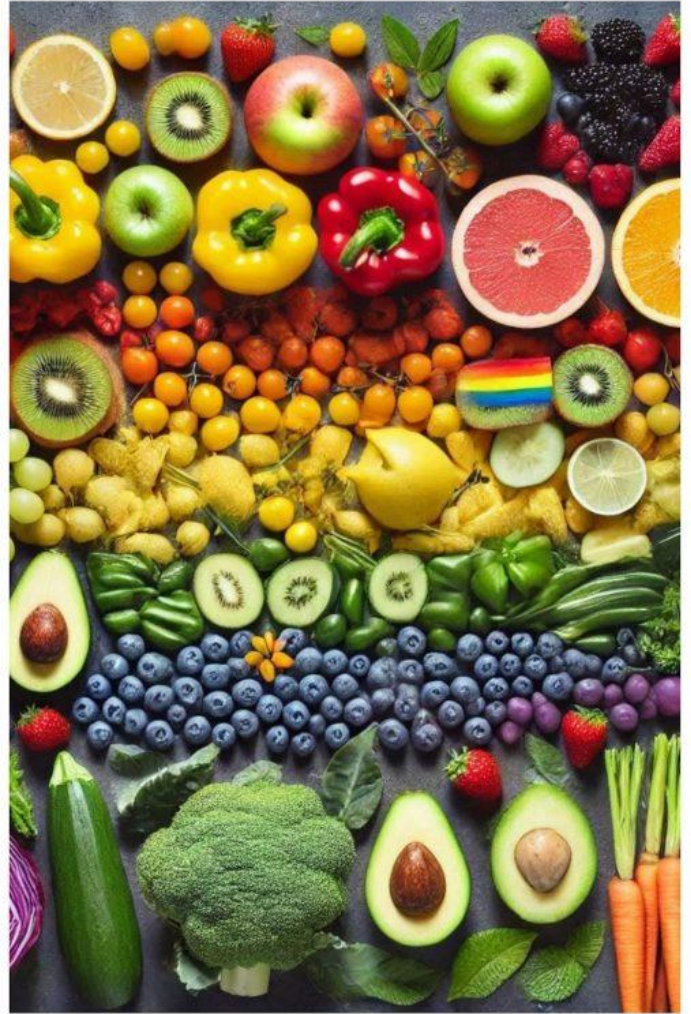
2. The Gut Microbiome's Super-Food is Fiber

Fiber's like a feast for your child's good bacteria. How to find it? Think plants plants plants!

- Fruits and vegetables of all kinds.
- Whole grains like brown rice, quinoa, and oats.
- Legumes such as lentils, chickpeas, and beans.

Give Your Child Choice with Food Selection. Have your child pick from some fiber-rich meals that will feed their inner superhero.

- Make a morning 'power bowl' with oatmeal, berries, and banana slices.
- Crunch on apple slices with peanut butter or hummus.
- Try 'superfood sandwiches' with a hummus spread, some colourful veggies, and wholegrain bread.



3. Eat the Rainbow to Feed the Gut Microbiome

Colourful plants are strongly associated with polyphenols known for their antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Different colours are linked with different compounds, so encourage your child to eat a range of 'rainbow' fruits and vegetables every day.

Go on a Rainbow Treasure Hunt. Each colour gives the body special powers:

- Red foods (like strawberries and tomatoes) help your heart stay strong.
- Orange foods (like carrots) help you see better at night.
- Yellow foods (like corn) keep your brain sharp.
- Green foods (like broccoli 'trees') make your bones strong.
- Blue/purple foods (like blueberries) help you remember things better.
- White foods (like cauliflower 'clouds') protect your body.

Maybe create a 'Rainbow Day' chart and have your child colour in the colour of each food they eat.

4. Visit Nature's Sweetie Factory

Too much sugar causes rapid spikes and drops in blood sugar levels. This leads to mood swings, irritability, and difficulty concentrating. Instead of sugary treats, try nature's own candy:

- Frozen blueberries (they taste like popsicles).
- Baked cinnamon apple slices.
- Banana 'nice cream' (just blend frozen bananas).

Arrange the plate in a flower pattern and it'll look all the more delicious to young eyes. Or, try these quick-to-make items when you have a little more time. Just google the phrases and recipes will pop up.

- Date and nut energy balls.
- Bean and beet power brownies (or pumpkin instead of beet).

Check out our delicious microbiome-friendly Applesauce Muffins in our [Baking Benefits](#) article.



5. Say No to Weird Chemicals in Foods

We now know that 'ultra processed' food with lots of additives is bad for the gut microbiome and health. Take a moment to read food labels. Choose products with ingredients you recognize and could find in

your kitchen. If you see a long list of unfamiliar chemicals and additives, consider looking for a less processed alternative.

But First! Go Slow, Be Realistic, and Seek Balance

Introducing new foods gradually and in small amounts can help a child with autism accept diet changes. Please consult with a paediatric dietitian, if needed, and adjust for any allergies your child might have.

We like this *Zoe Science and Nutrition* article for its sensible advice and great tips. Perhaps read it before you begin to make changes? [Tips to Help Your Family Eat Healthier](https://www.zoe.com/learn-to-read-more-about-life-giving-nutrition)



Visit [zoe.com/learn](https://www.zoe.com/learn-to-read-more-about-life-giving-nutrition) to read more about life-giving nutrition.

Plan to be patient, creative, and flexible. Dietary changes take time and that's okay, every small improvement counts.