How can people with ADHD eat healthier?

By: Dr. Shirley Hershko

People with ADHD eat unhealthier foods, despite their knowledge about the risks. Because they are more influenced by advertising, a possible intervention may be to increase the attractiveness and the convenience of healthy foods.

ADHD is associated with unhealthy dietary patterns, which may directly lead to excess weight gain. They consume less healthy foods (such as vegetables and fruits) and more unhealthy foods (fatty, sweet and processed foods). The health risks associated with an unbalanced diet have become the leading factor contributing to the global burden of disease. Hence, it is necessary to find intervention programs aimed to improve the eating patterns of individuals with ADHD.

There is a discrepancy between the unhealthy eating behavior of individuals with ADHD and their food-related perceptions. They have the same benefit and risk food perceptions, as individuals without ADHD. Meaning they know what is dangerous and what is better to eat but their behavior does not match their knowledge. Therefore, it is important to focus on their environment. It has been found that environmental factors can influence food choices (emphasizing the attractiveness and convenience of the food). Moreover, individuals with ADHD are more influenced by advertising, compared to individuals without ADHD. Healthy food advertisements raise their healthy food choices. Possible explanations for this phenomenon are their impulsivity and sensitivity to rewards.

About the Author

Dr. Shirley Hershko is director of the diagnostic and support center, a senior teacher and a researcher at the Hebrew University in Israel. Her study won an award at the world congress on ADHD.

Resources