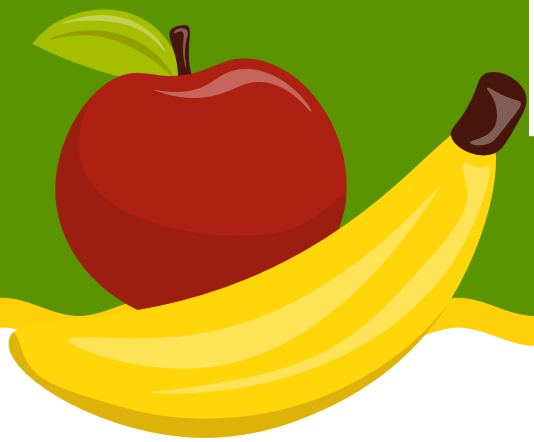
Nutrition Basic Terminology

Guide for Special Needs Families

Silent Voyces

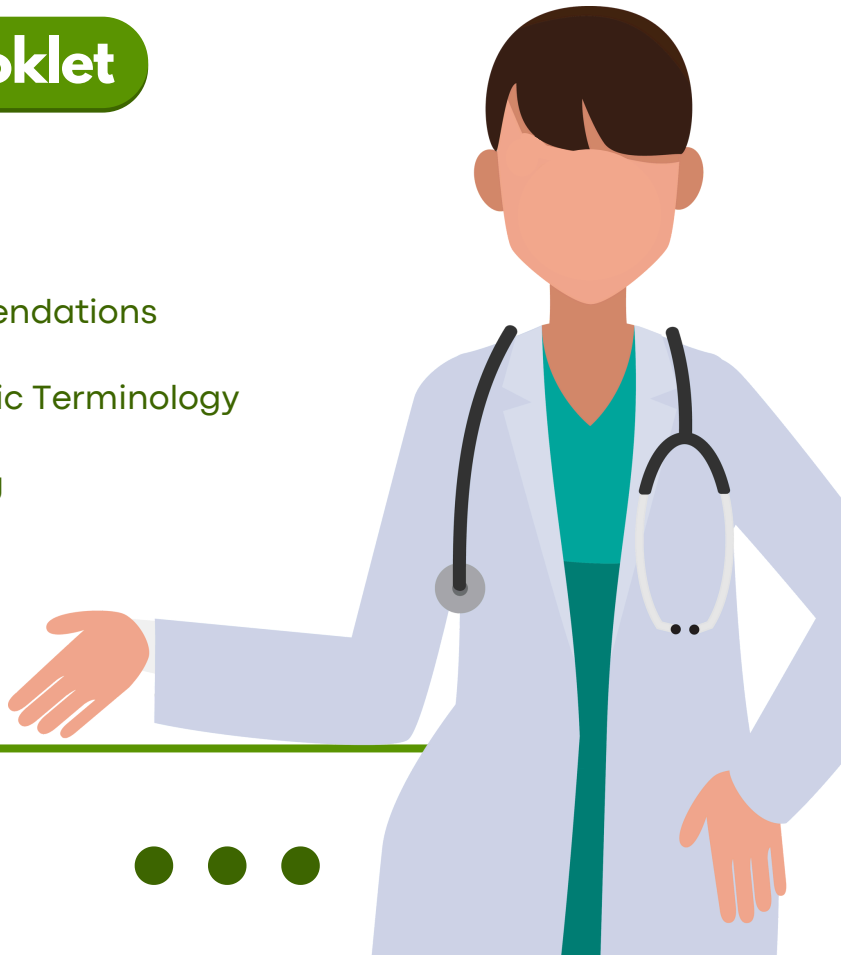
Introduction.



Health is the most valuable asset in life. A healthy lifestyle and balanced nutrition are vital in keeping the body fit and preventing various diseases. This guide will help you understand how to lead a healthier life.

Purpose of This Booklet

- Raising Health Awareness
- Offering Practical Recommendations
- Providing Resources for Basic Terminology
- Encouraging Healthy Eating



Basic Terminology

As a parent or caregiver of a child with special needs, you're constantly navigating decisions that support your child's development, behavior, and overall well-being. One of the most powerful yet sometimes overlooked areas of support is nutrition.

What your child eats—and how their body processes it—can significantly impact mood, focus, energy, and even sensory regulation.

This glossary is designed to help you understand key nutrition terms that are often relevant for children with autism, ADHD, developmental delays, sensory challenges, and other unique needs.

Whether you're new to this journey or looking to deepen your knowledge, this guide will give you the language and clarity to confidently explore food-related choices, speak with healthcare providers, and advocate for your child’s unique nutritional needs.

Use this as a reference, a starting point for deeper conversations, and a reminder that small, informed choices can make a big difference in your child’s growth and quality of life.

Feeding Approaches

Below is a list of common ways that children with special needs are fed, reflecting the wide range of support strategies used in both home and clinical settings:

🥄 Ways Special Needs Children Are Fed

1. Oral Feeding (Traditional Eating by Mouth)
   - With adaptations: such as smaller bites, soft foods, or modified textures.
   - May include occupational therapy support for motor coordination or sensory aversions.

2. Texture-Modified Diets
   - Pureed, soft, or mechanical soft foods used for children with swallowing or chewing difficulties.
   - Sometimes recommended for children with dysphagia or oral-motor delays.

3. G-Tube Feeding (Gastrostomy Tube)
   - A tube inserted directly into the stomach to deliver nutrition.
   - Used when oral feeding isn't safe or sufficient (e.g., severe neurological conditions, aspiration risk).

4. NG Tube Feeding (Nasogastric Tube)
   - A temporary tube inserted through the nose into the stomach.
   - Often used short-term while developing oral feeding skills or recovering from illness.

Feeding Approaches

5. Supplemental Nutrition Drinks or Formulas
   - High-calorie or nutrient-dense drinks (e.g., Pediasure) to support growth or fill gaps in a limited diet.
   - Often recommended for children with low appetite, picky eating, or restricted diets.

6. Feeding with Assistance
   - May require hand-over-hand help, adaptive utensils, or positioning support.
   - Common in children with motor impairments (e.g., cerebral palsy).

7. Self-Feeding with Adaptive Tools
   - Children use specialized utensils, cups, or plates to increase independence.
   - Tools may have weighted handles, built-in grips, or guards.

8. Behavior-Based Feeding Programs
   - Uses positive reinforcement and structured routines to help children with severe food aversions or anxiety.
   - Often led by feeding therapists or ABA specialists.

Feeding Approaches

9. Sensory-Based Feeding Therapy
   - Helps children who reject certain textures, temperatures, or smells.
   - Often integrated into occupational therapy using play-based desensitization.

10. Scheduled Feeding Times or Grazing
    - Some children need frequent small meals, while others do better on structured meal/snack times to reduce overwhelm.
    - Tailored to energy needs and sensory regulation.
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11. Blended Diet via Tube (Blenderized Feeding)
    - Whole foods are blended and delivered through a feeding tube.
    - An alternative to commercial formulas for families seeking a more natural nutrition approach.

12. Assisted Oral-Motor Exercises
    - Includes chewing practice, tongue movement, or lip closure techniques.
    - Often guided by speech-language pathologists or feeding specialists.

💡 Important Notes:
- Feeding approaches are often customized and guided by a team including pediatricians, dietitians, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists.
- Feeding plans can change over time as the child's needs and abilities evolve.

Basic Terminology

1. Food Sensitivity
A reaction to certain foods that shows up hours or days later. It may cause mood changes, stomach aches, or skin issues.
➡️ Example: Your child gets cranky or bloated after eating bread, but isn't allergic.

2. Food Allergy
A strong immune response that happens right after eating a food. Can be serious and requires medical attention.
➡️ Example: Hives, swelling, or trouble breathing after eating peanuts.

3. Gluten
A protein found in wheat, barley, and rye. Some children are sensitive to it and may feel better without it.
➡️ Common in bread, pasta, crackers.

4. Casein
A protein found in milk and other dairy products. Sometimes avoided in diets for children with autism or tummy issues.
➡️ Found in milk, cheese, yogurt.

5. Elimination Diet
A short-term diet where you remove certain foods to see if they're causing problems. Foods are slowly added back in to test reactions.

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6. Sensory Processing
How your child reacts to smells, textures, and tastes of food. Some kids might avoid certain foods or crave specific ones.
➡️ Example: Refusing mushy foods or needing very crunchy snacks.

7. Probiotics
“Good bacteria” that help with digestion and gut health. Often found in supplements or foods like yogurt.
➡️ May help with constipation, mood, and immunity.

8. Nutrient Deficiency
When the body doesn’t get enough vitamins or minerals. Can affect energy, mood, sleep, or behavior.
➡️ Common ones: iron, vitamin D, zinc.

9. Whole Foods
Foods that are fresh and minimally processed—closer to how they grow in nature.
➡️ Examples: Fresh fruits, vegetables, eggs, lean meats.

10. Artificial Additives
Colors, flavors, or preservatives added to processed food. Some children are sensitive to these and may become more hyper or moody. ➡️ Watch out for things like Red 40, MSG, sodium benzoate.

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11. Omega-3 Fatty Acids
Healthy fats that support brain development, focus, and mood. Found in fish, flaxseed, or supplements.
➡️ Especially helpful for kids with ADHD or learning challenges.

12. Fortified Foods
Foods with added vitamins and minerals to help fill nutrition gaps.

➡️ Example: Iron-fortified cereal, vitamin D milk.
13. GI (Gastrointestinal) Symptoms
Tummy troubles like gas, constipation, diarrhea, or reflux. These can affect mood, behavior, and focus.