



# How Food Shapes Mood, Energy & Behaviour

Simple nutrition strategies to support calm, focused, thriving children



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# About Me...



**I'm Kellie, a certified Diet and Lifestyle advisor trained at the The Institute of Optimum Nutrition (ION) and a full member of the FHT (Federation of Holistic Therapists).**

**I'm on a mission to help people and their families to feel their best with simple, sustainable food and lifestyle choices.**



**I've worked in education, as an ELSA supporting young people to reach their potential through a lifestyle medicine approach — focusing on nutrition, sleep, movement, stress, social connection, and avoiding harmful habits.**

**I'm passionate about helping others thrive through simple, sustainable changes.**

# What We'll Cover

- What are Ultra Processed Foods? (UPFs)
- Why food affects behaviour
- The most common food–behaviour links
- Simple changes you can try straight away



# Important things to note...

- This is NOT about judgement.
- This is NOT about perfection.
- Start where you're at and make one small change at a time
- It's the small changes that stick that make the biggest difference.
- Whether your child is neurotypical or neurodivergent, these strategies can help support calmer behaviour, steadier energy, and better focus.



# You are not Alone

- Many parents are worried about behaviour, focus or emotions
- Behaviour is communication — not “bad parenting”



# The Modern World Makes This Hard

- Ultra-processed foods are everywhere and are designed to be tempting, tasty, irresistible long-lasting and convenient
- Busy schedules mean convenience often wins
- Children are eating more often, but not always better - Snacking Culture
- Screens take us away from the family dining table
- There are so many mixed messages about food



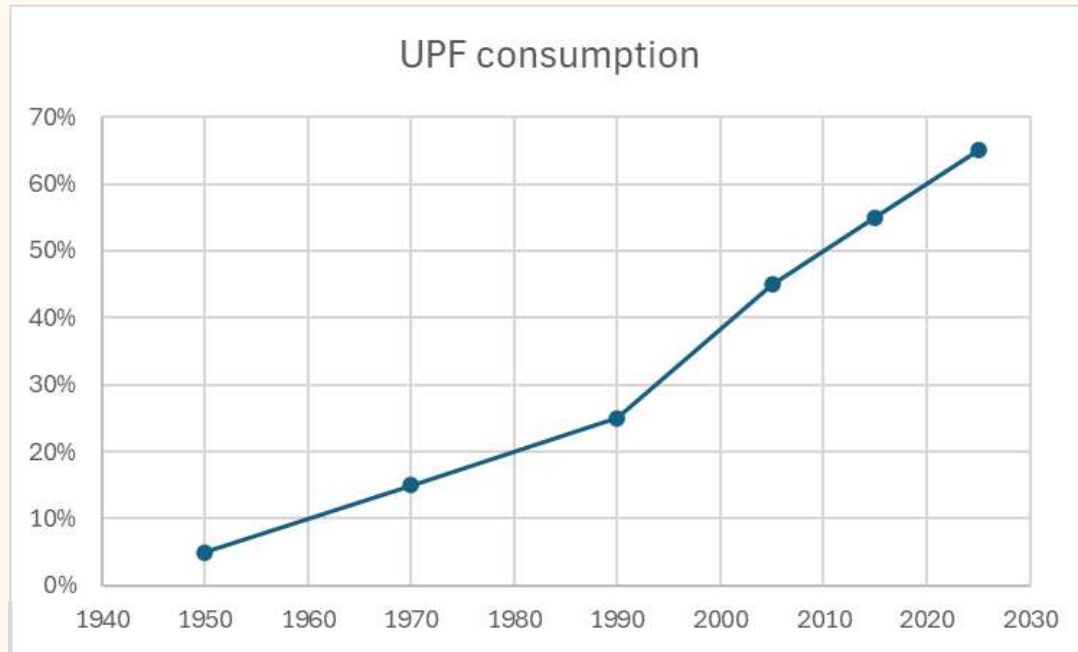
# WHAT ARE ULTRA PROCESSED FOODS?

UPFs = foods that are heavily altered and contain ingredients you wouldn't use at home.

## Common signs a food is a UPF:

- Long ingredient list
- Ingredients you don't recognise
- Flavour enhancers, emulsifiers, colourings
- "Diet", "low-fat", "kids' snacks", "fortified" labels
- Foods that feel more like "products" than food

# The Rise of Ultra Processed Foods



# Why UPFs Reduce Nutrient Intake

Not all UPFs are “bad” — but they can displace real food

Ultra-processed foods don't need to be eliminated, and they absolutely have a place in modern family life. The issue is that when they take up too much space in a child's diet, they naturally push out the foods that support steadier energy, mood and focus, such as:

- fruit and vegetables
- wholegrains
- quality protein
- healthy fats

It's less about banning UPFs and more about making sure there's still room for the foods that genuinely nourish growing brains and bodies.

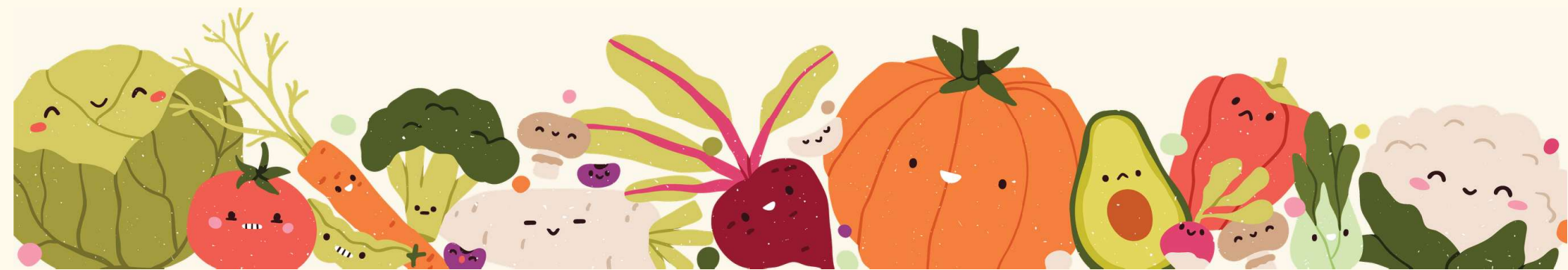
# Not all UPFs are Bad!



# Behaviour Is Influenced by Many Things

Food is one piece of the puzzle but it's one we can often support more consistently and when nutrition improves things like energy, mood, and focus can become easier to manage - which can have a positive effect on things like sleep and stress.

- Sleep
- Stress
- Screens
- Routine
- Big Emotions



# **Three Nutritional Pillars Affecting Behaviour**

**1. Blood sugar balance**

**2. Gut Health**

**3. Key Nutrients**

# 1. Blood sugar balance

When children eat foods that are very sugary or highly refined, their blood sugar rises quickly.

This gives a short burst of energy — sometimes hyperactivity, impulsivity or big emotions — followed by a drop.

That drop can look like irritability, tears, poor concentration, tiredness or meltdowns.



# The Blood Sugar Rollercoaster

Why kids can go from calm to chaotic:



# After-School Meltdowns Explained

- Long gap since lunch
- Tired nervous systems
- Blood sugar crash



# The Solution = Steadier Fuel

## Start the Day Strong

A breakfast with protein helps children feel calmer, fuller and more focused.

(Think eggs, yoghurt, nut butter on toast, porridge with seeds.)

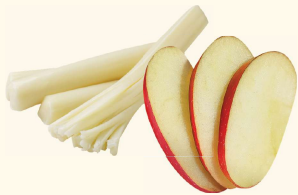


# The Solution = Steadier Fuel

## Balance Snacks

Pair carbs with protein or fat to avoid energy crashes.

(Fruit + nuts, crackers + cheese, yoghurt + berries.)



Yoghurt+berries+oats

Hummus + veg sticks

Cheese + apple

Nut butter on toast

Boiled eggs + tomatoes

# The Solution = Steadier Fuel

## Keep It Regular

Children cope better when they eat consistently.

Long gaps = bigger dips in mood and energy.

Breakfast → Balanced Snack → Lunch → Balanced Snack  
→ Dinner → Balanced Snack

**Bottom Line: When energy is steady, behaviour is steadier.**

## 2. Gut Health

Gut health is about how well your child's digestive system - and the trillions of bacteria living in it - are working to support their body and brain.

Inside the gut live billions of microbes that help to:

- Break down food
- Absorb nutrients
- Support the immune system
- Communicate with the brain



# The Gut-Brain Connection

## Gut health can influence mood and emotions

- An unsettled gut can show up as anxiety, low mood or irritability

## Good gut bacteria support calmer behaviour

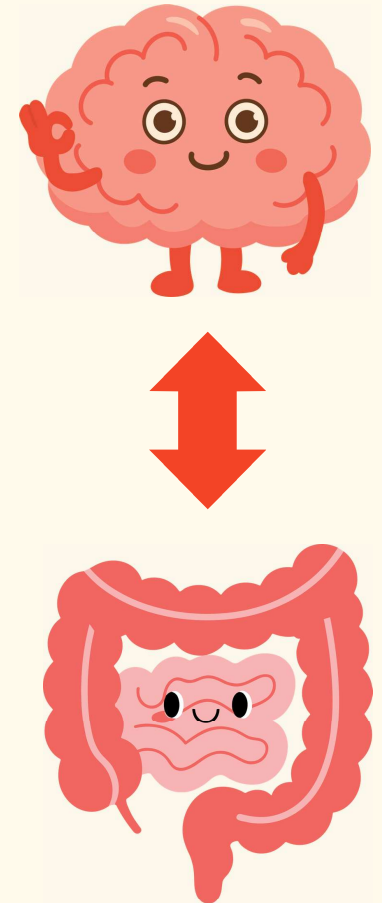
- They help make chemicals linked to mood and wellbeing

## Fibre feeds those good bacteria

- Found in fruit, vegetables, beans, wholegrains

## Variety matters more than perfection

- Different plants feed different bacteria



# Supporting Gut Health

## Feed the Good Bacteria

Include a variety of fibre-rich foods across the week.  
(Fruit, vegetables, oats, beans, lentils, wholegrains.)

## Add in Natural Fermented Foods

These can help introduce beneficial bacteria.  
(Live yoghurt, kefir, sauerkraut — small amounts are enough.)



# Supporting Gut Health

## Keep It Diverse

Variety matters more than perfection.  
Different plant foods feed different microbes

## Support the Basics

Sleep, movement and regular meals all help the gut-brain connection.



**A well-fed gut helps support calmer moods, steadier energy and stronger resilience.**

## 3. Key Nutrients

Key nutrients are the building blocks the brain and body need to function well.

Children's brains are still developing. To support mood, focus and emotional regulation, they need a steady supply of specific nutrients — not just calories.

Certain vitamins, minerals, fats and amino acids help to:

- Produce calming and focusing brain chemicals
- Support attention and learning
- Regulate energy
- Strengthen resilience to stress



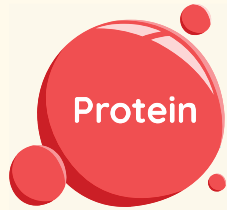
When intake is low, emotional regulation, concentration and energy is much harder.

# Key Nutrients for Calm & Focus

**Nourished brains regulate better.**

## Prioritise Protein

Protein provides the building blocks for brain chemicals that influence mood and attention.  
(Eggs, chicken, fish, beans, lentils, yoghurt, cheese, nuts, seeds.)



## Include Healthy Fats

The brain is nearly 60% fat — it relies on the right types for development and focus.  
(Oily fish, olive oil, nuts, seeds, avocado.)



## Don't Forget Iron & Zinc

These minerals are important for concentration, energy and emotional regulation.  
(Red meat, poultry, beans, pumpkin seeds, leafy greens.)



## Aim for Real Food Variety

The more variety across the week, the wider the nutrient coverage.



# Practical Strategies You Can Use Tomorrow!

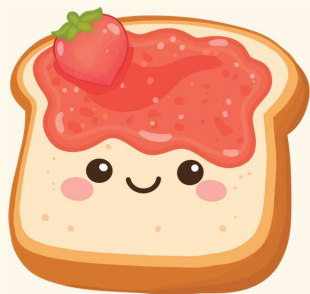
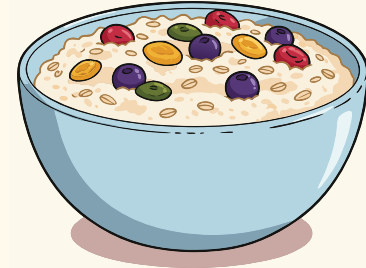
## BEHAVIOUR-FRIENDLY BREAKFAST SWAPS



Swap sugary cereals for protein & fibre

Instead of: Frosted flakes / sugary cereal

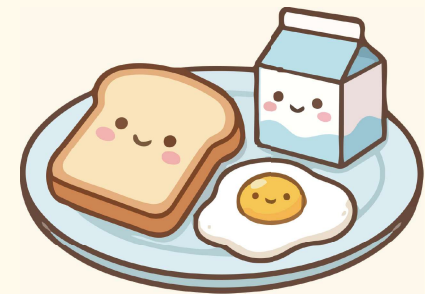
Try: Porridge or overnight oats + berries + nut butter



Swap toast + jam for protein & healthy fat

Instead of: White toast + jam

Try: Wholegrain toast + peanut/almond butter or scrambled eggs



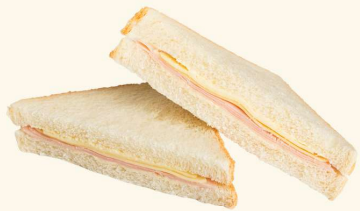
# Practical Strategies You Can Use Tomorrow!

## STRESS-FREE LUNCHBOX UPGRADES

Swap plain sandwiches for balanced combos

Instead of: White bread + processed ham

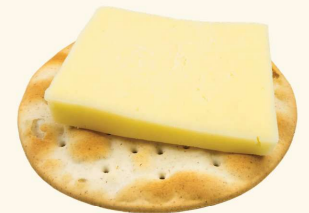
Try: Wholegrain wrap + hummus + chicken / turkey +  
grated veg



Swap processed treats for mini homemade options

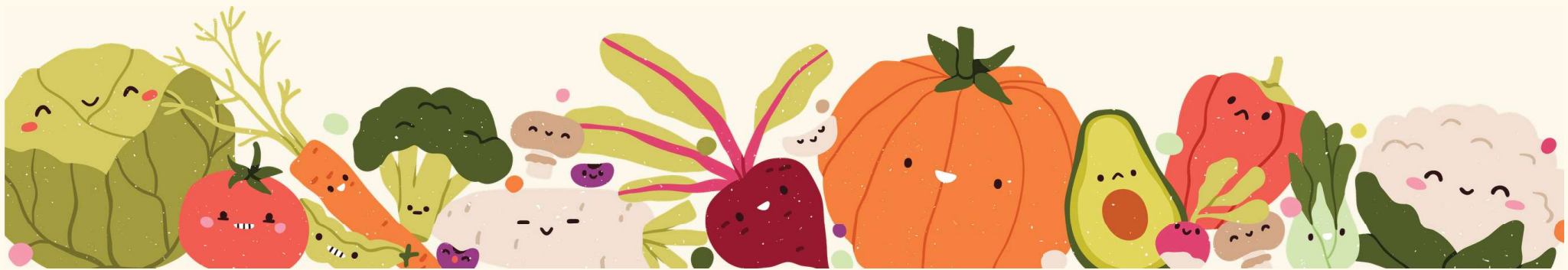
Instead of: Shop-bought processed snacks

Try: Cheese & crackers, yogurt, or popcorn



# What This Looks Like Over Time

- Fewer extreme energy dips
- More predictable behaviour
- Calmer mealtimes
- More confident parents



# Real Life Still Happens

- Parties
- Weekends
- Busy days
- Takeaways

Aim for progress, not perfection



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**Want more support?**



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# 4-Week Parent Workshop

**Raising Calm, Focused Kids in a Busy World**  
**Starts 28 April · Tuesdays 8–9pm**

## WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- How food and daily rhythms shape behaviour
- How to stabilise energy and mood using blood sugar balance
- How gut health influences emotional regulation
- The key nutrients that support focus and calm
- Hydration habits that reduce irritability and fatigue
- Practical swaps and routines that fit real family life

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Four live online sessions
- Weekly tools and checklists
- Behaviour-friendly lunch box guide
- The Family Plan to help you make lasting changes
- Replays of every session
- A supportive, judgement-free space to ask questions

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# 4-Week Parent Workshop

**Perfect for busy parents who want:**

- **Fewer meltdowns**
- **Better focus**
- **Steadier energy**
- **Less stress around food**

Join the 4-week online workshop

To book  <https://l.bttr.to/liPbw>

or visit [www.dietandlifestyletherapy.com/parent-workshop](http://www.dietandlifestyletherapy.com/parent-workshop)

£59 (usually £79)

Bring-a-Friend: £10 off each: use code FRIEND10

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Thank you

