

THE BRAIN STAGES

# 8 SECRETS TO HELPING KIDS GROW INTO SUCCESSFUL ADULTS

BACKED BY RESEARCH



Thanks for joining our Brain Stages community of people who want to make the world a better place for parents and the next generation!

This powerful list of eight essentials for raising well-adjusted children summarizes researchers' latest findings—all in one place. Some you're likely doing already, a few you may decide to do with more regularity, and a couple may be new to you altogether. You'll find that a few small tweaks can make a huge difference!



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1. Talk to your kids—and listen. 
2. Time **outside** 
3. Daily **exercise** that makes them sweat 
4. Brain **Foods** with omegas—  
veggies, eggs, walnuts, fish 
5. **Sleep**—9 to 11 hours every night 
6. Plenty of **water**—  
- ages 5 to 8 about cups  
- ages 9 to 11, 9 or 10 cups 
7. **Downtime**—imaginative play 
8. Screen time **limitations**—about 2 cumulative hours of quality games or programs 

## Talk to your kids—and listen.

This may sound obvious, but you'd be surprised how often adults think they're having conversations with kids, without giving them much chance to participate. Your storytelling and suggestions can be helpful and nurturing, but it turns out that children need to engage in two-way communication, an exchange of ideas, rather than just listening to adults' sage advice.



This can be tedious when kids seem to take forever to get to the point. It's hard to keep listening, much less respond. On the flipside, some children seldom talk. Lots of patience and gentle prodding with open-ended questions are required to get them to communicate.



Whether your child is quiet or chatty, a study at the Massachusetts Institution of Technology (MIT) found that the deciding factor for how well children develop language, social skills, and generally find success in life is directly related to how much adults engage them in two-way conversations—across economic and education strata (Romeo et al. 2018).



## Time outside.

Never mind the weather. Bundle up in low temps, and wear shorts and apply sunscreen when it's hot. Outdoor play has amazing benefits. A little running around in the fresh air helps kids improve social skills, stay focused, and think better for learning (Adams et al. 2016). Heck, researchers have even found that spending time outside keeps kids' vision sharper (Wu et al. 2013).



## Make sure your kids get exercise. EVERY DAY.

There's nothing like heart-pumping activities to get oxygen to kids' brains for healthy functioning. Kids who exercise an hour a day can focus and process information better than those who don't (Hillman et al. 2014). They also sleep better, maintain healthier weight, and tend to have a sunnier outlook (Baron et al. 2013).



FYI, if YOU make a point of working out regularly, you'll have a much better chance of avoiding dementia when you get older (Matura et al. 2017). You'll also have more energy manage stress better than your friends who don't exercise. Besides, modeling a powerful habit for your kids with have lasting benefits—for all of you.



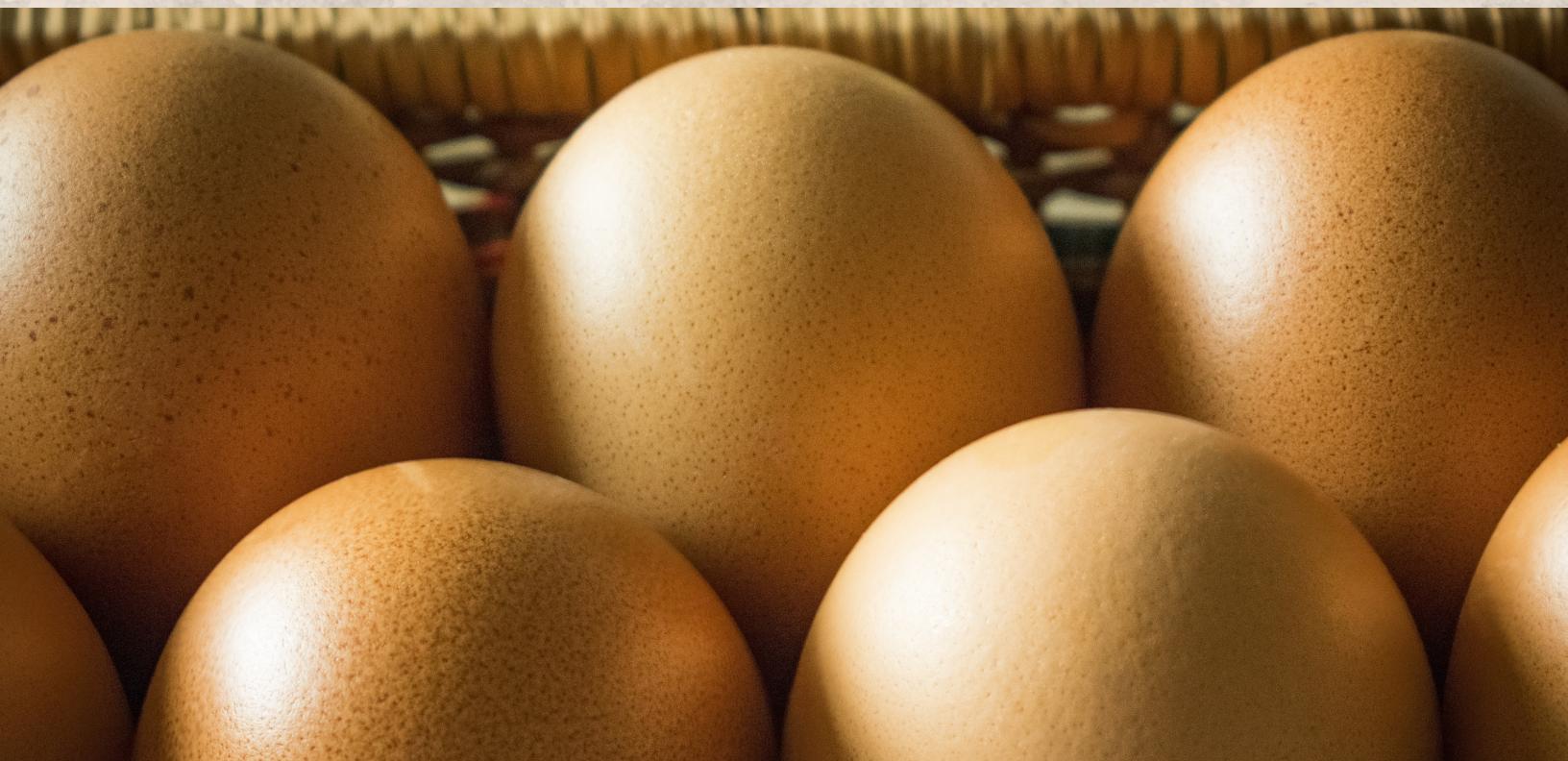
Consider finding an activity the entire family can enjoy—yoga, dancing, swimming, basketball etc.

You'll generate fond family memories working out together as well as give your kids a whopping brain booster that will set them up for a healthy life overall.



## **Brain Foods with omegas—veggies, eggs, walnuts, fish**

Feed your kids veggies and eggs. Things like leafy greens, sweet red peppers, and broccoli provide vitamins, omega 3s, and micronutrients that kids need for healthy brain function and development. Omega 3s and 9s, proven brain boosters, are readily available in fish, but lots of parents have a hard time making fish available more than once or twice a week.

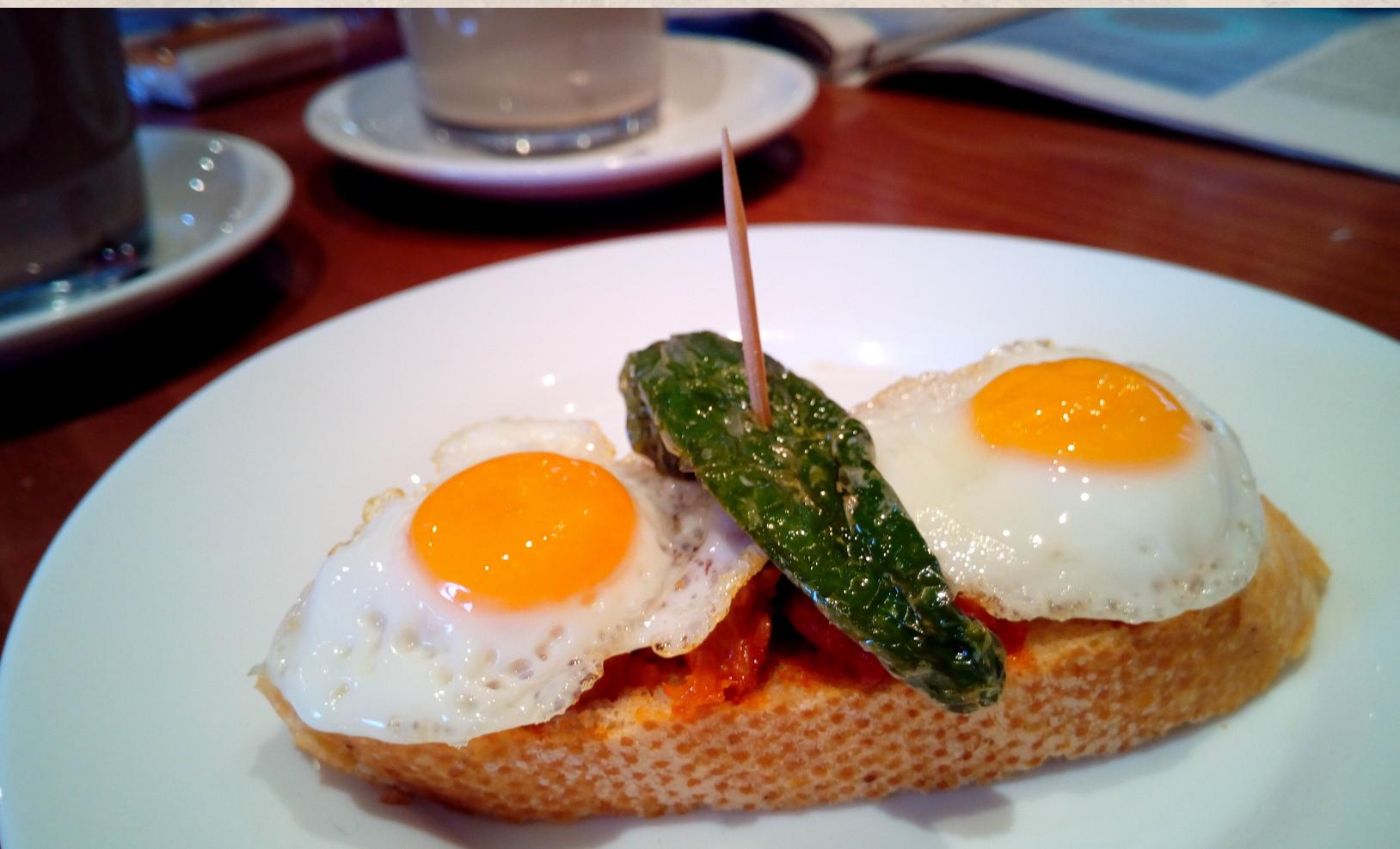


Sometimes getting kids to eat salmon or trout can be a challenge. Most kids will eat eggs, though.

Eggs offer omegas in an inexpensive, complete package of healthy fat and protein. In fact, a study found that kids who ate eggs were better able to think and learn in school than kids who didn't (Iannotti et al. 2017).



Trouble making time to cook eggs during busy mornings? Try hard boiling the entire carton on the weekend, and your family can eat them throughout the week. Kids usually get a sense of satisfaction learning to peel them without help, although it can be a little messy in the beginning.



For picky eaters who need a little extra incentive to eat eggs, try buying a few extra Easter egg coloring kits in the spring for occasional decorating parties throughout the year. If you can't even find time to boil eggs on the weekend, they're a little more expensive, but you can buy peeled hardboiled eggs in grocery stores now.



## Sleep—9 to 11 hours every night

Do yourself and your children a favor by putting focused effort into a regular bedtime routine. This includes leaving social events early when necessary to ensure adequate zzz-time. A longitudinal study found that kids who grow up with consistent bedtimes not only get more sleep, but they do better in school and in life (Kitsaros et al. 2018).



Here's why kids (well, most people) do better with adequate sleep.

Rejuvenating delta waves during sleep are critical to reset the human brain for a new day of thinking. Our slowest brain waves also help the body repair itself by getting rid of dead cells, healing injured ones, and stimulating the generation of new cells.



Children between age 5 and 13 should get between 9 and 11 hours of sleep each night (National Sleep Foundation 2018). Getting crabby and loopy are ways our bodies force us to power down for a while—even when kids don't want to. Often we, the adults, sacrifice sleep when we feel like have to get certain chores done before we go to bed. It's amazing how much more we can accomplish when we've had enough rest, though, right? And our children are no different.



## Create a routine to ensure your kids drink plenty of WATER.

It's hard to believe that something as simple as water can have so much impact, but water does all kinds of things to make our bodies work right. Water helps us absorb nutrients from food, it helps regulate our internal body temperature, and it greases our joints to keep us moving. Water even provides a buffer for our brains and spinal cords, so hydration offers active kids a special kind of protection from injury.



Children are particularly susceptible to dehydration, and even one percent dehydration can make 'em grumpy, muddle their minds, and mess with the memory centers in their brains. They can get headaches, stomachaches, and dry eyes. American children are notorious for not drinking enough water. The FDA recommends children ages 5 to 8 drink about 6 cups/day, 9 to 11-year-olds about 8 or 9 cups/day. Adjust for heavy exercise, and keep in mind that a serving of fresh fruit or raw vegetables provides a half-cup of water.



This doesn't need to be an exact science, just do what you can to keep your child hydrated (Live Strong 2017).

Have your child drink a cup of water in the morning since we all wake up a little dehydrated. Send a water bottle to school, and hand over a cup of water to guzzle after school. Offer some more after dinner, about two hours before bedtime. Adequate water will enable your child to think and sleep better, and she'll get sick less often too (Adan 2012).



## Down time

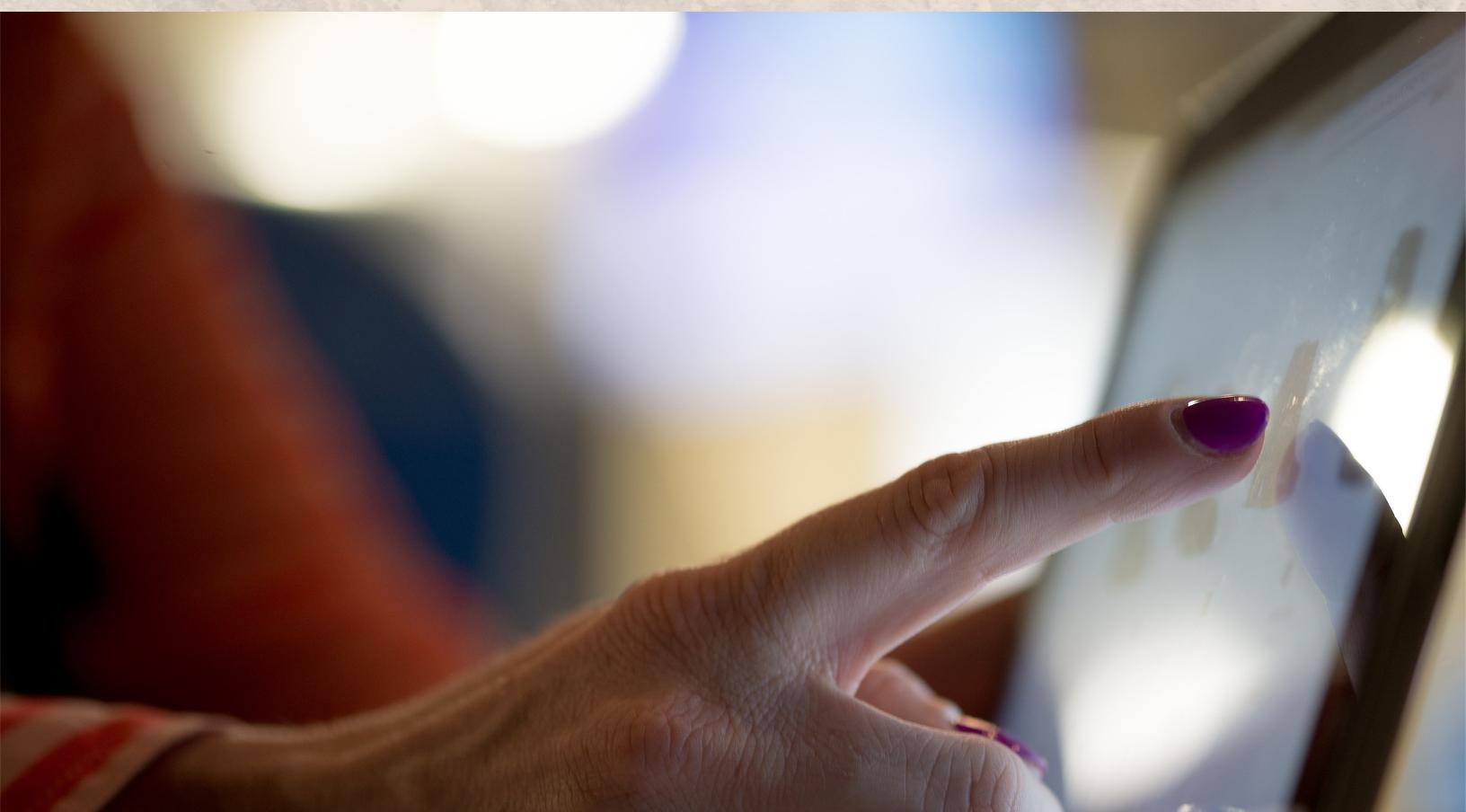
Allow a daily break from have-to activities to allow free play. And no, video games and TV don't count.

Free play does everything from develop language skills, problem solving abilities, and cognitive processing to trigger the secretion of BDNF, a chemical that promotes brain cell growth (Hillman et al. 2014). Besides, unstructured play gives parents a break, it's fun, and it provides too many benefits for kids to pass up!



## **Screen time limitations—about 2 cumulative hours of quality games or programs**

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends parents draw the line for school-age children at about two hours' cumulative screen time, but they say more important than rationing minutes is the kind of activities kids engage in.



For example, children can benefit from computer games that encourage critical thinking or teach skills, and studies indicate that children who are allowed no screen time fare worse than children in households who are given moderate time.

On the other hand, as little as 90 minutes watching YouTube videos or TV shows puts kids at risk for gaining weight and not getting the exercise they need, especially for kids between ages 6 and 9.



**Studies also indicate that watching screens within two hours of bedtime interferes with brain waves and can keep children from getting to and staying asleep (AAP 2016)**

**In short, pay attention and even participate in your child's screen time. Watch shows and play electronic games together occasionally to ensure good choices. If screen time doesn't take the place of conversations, physical activity, imaginary play, or sleep, even past the two-hour general guideline, the AAP says your child could be better for it.**



Now that you know the reasons for the eight things that will give your child a leg up to becoming a well-educated, happy human, you'll find a quick list that follows the references that you can print and put on the family bulletin board or the refrigerator. Use it as a sort of cheat-sheet reminder for raising happy, well-adjusted.



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