

The SAT and ACT Brain Diet

Recommended by Geri Brewster RD, MPH, CDN

Teens' bodies are metabolizing at an extremely fast rate relative to the lifetime average metabolic rate. Growing, developing, maturing – all of this takes lots of energy, and the body burns calories in the process. What this translates into is teens can eat, and eat, and eat – and still be hungry. And at 16 – who wants to eat apples and bran muffins all day long? It's candy, sweets, potato chips, pizza and caffeine that teens survive on! All of these "junk foods" literally intoxicate the body and run interference with clear thinking patterns. Low blood sugar from refined and sugary foods is responsible for "fuzzy" thinking and increased anxiety. Bad trans fats, found on ingredient labels as "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" displace beneficial fats that the body uses to improve cognitive skills. When it's time for the SAT or ACT, there can be no fuzzy thinking!!

Therefore, the week before your SAT or ACT exams, it is important to "detox" your body by eliminating junk food. Below are the 6 guidelines for the SAT/ACT Brain Diet:

1. Stop eating and/or drinking food and beverages that contain high fructose corn syrup and/or partially hydrogenated vegetable oil.
2. Stop consuming artificial colors and sweeteners.
3. Avoid cake, cookies, candy, ice cream, and snack foods with more than 10 ingredients. For example, certain flavored corn chips have many ingredients whereas plain, salted tortilla chips will have only about 5. Stay with "simple" foods – real foods that are recognizable as made up of actual food.
4. Drink at least 24 ounces of water a day. Seltzer or Perrier can also be taken as beverages to replace soda. 100% fruit juice is OK during the day, but don't exceed 12 ounces. Although it's natural, juice contains a lot of sugar.
5. Eat at least 2 pieces of fruit a day and have at least 1 serving of raw vegetables a day.
6. Eat breakfast every day. Include a protein in your breakfast such as an egg or a string cheese or some natural peanut butter (if not allergic) or some Canadian bacon.

Protein helps the body make dopamine, a brain neurotransmitter that is responsible for alertness. Sugar helps the body make serotonin, a brain neurotransmitter that is

responsible for relaxation and sleepiness. So, have less sugar and more protein the week of the SAT or ACT.

The day before the test, and the morning of, make sure you eat plenty of lean protein and complex carbohydrates (whole grain foods) so you'll be as energized and alert as possible for the test. Eat a big, healthy dinner the night before and a hearty breakfast test-day morning. Skip the Captain Crunch and go for some scrambled eggs and wheat toast. This is a brain diet – and it's only for a week! So put down that candy bar...wait until the test is over...and then celebrate with a Kit Kat, soda, or Frappuccino!