

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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## SUPERNUTRIENTS MEAN SUPER HEALTH FOR CHILDREN

DALLAS – November 20, 1998 – Salmon, butternut squash, lean beef and spinach may not sound like any child’s idea of the perfect meal. But as evidence mounts that four supernutrients – vitamin A, iron, omega-3 fatty acids and folic acid – act as the foundation for a child’s good health, concerned parents should consider new ways to make these foods and others like them appetizing, said Dr. Robert Squires Jr., associate professor of pediatrics at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

Vitamin-A deficiency is implicated in measles mortality; iron deficiency is associated with a loss of developmental skills; omega-3 deficiency has been blamed for decreased visual acuity; and folic-acid deficiency in pregnant women can cause neural-tube, or brain and spinal, defects, said Squires, who sees patients in the gastroenterology clinic at Children’s Medical Center of Dallas.

When mothers of the 1930s spooned out cod-liver oil as a cure-all, they weren’t ignorant victims of old wives’ tales. The foul-tasting elixir is rich in vitamin A, which plays a large role in maintaining mucous membranes and protecting the body against infection, Squires said.

“Vitamin-A deficiency has a proven role in measles mortality. The measles virus affects the lung tissue, so when children die from measles, they die from respiratory failure,” the pediatrician said.

Recurrent studies have shown that a child can be iron deficient without being anemic and still exhibit such negative consequences as subpar motor skills, low IQ and low athletic endurance, Squires said.

(MORE)

## PEDIATRIC NUTRITION – 2

Omega-3 fatty acids are abundant in fish and green vegetables. The metabolic byproduct of omega-3 fatty acids, docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), is an important component in the brain and in retinal proteins.

“Infants fed formula deficient in omega-3 fatty acids have a measurable decrease in visual acuity,” Squires said. “Visual acuity is enhanced when DHA is added to the formula.”

He said breast milk, which contains DHA, is the best source for infants.

Many large-scale studies have shown that folic acid plays a significant role in prevention of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida, which occur when a segment of the spinal nerve cord grows outside the bony spiny column.

“There are certainly increased requirements of folic acid during fetal growth,” Squires said. “In the 1990s, we have the option of preventing neural-tube defects. All women of child-bearing age should consume at least 0.4 milligrams of folic acid per day.”

This year the Food and Drug Administration began requiring that all flour products, including pasta and bread, be enriched with folic acid. Some cereals are also fortified with folic acid.

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