

# Feeding the right protein to children

JOHANNESBURG: South African supermarkets offer a large selection of food products geared towards children making it challenging to know which choice is best and what nutrients children need to grow and develop properly. Many parents are aware that protein plays an essential role in child nutrition; however, few know that incorporating soy into a child's diet provides an excellent source of high-quality, complete protein.



"Adequate protein is especially important during times of rapid growth, such as infancy, childhood and adolescence", said Dr. Ratna Mukherjea, global nutrition lead at Solae. "Soy protein is comparable in quality to that of egg, milk and other animal proteins; however, unlike most animal-based proteins it is low in saturated fat and cholesterol free."

"What's more is that it's the only widely available plant-based protein that provides a source of all the essential amino acids needed to fully meet the protein needs of children aged 2 and older," said Dr. Mukherjea.

## Fortified with key nutrients

In addition to providing protein, many soy foods are fortified with key nutrients including calcium, riboflavin, folic acid and vitamin D. Another important attribute of soy in child nutrition is that soy is naturally lactose-free, and therefore, appropriate for children with lactose-intolerance or dairy protein allergy.

Considering child obesity is a growing problem in South Africa with 1 in 6 children aged between one and nine living in urban areas classified as overweight<sup>1</sup>, it's critical that parents look for nutritious foods that keep their children feeling fuller for longer.

"Protein has been found to be more satiating than either carbohydrate or fat. Incorporating soy protein in a child's daily diet can promote the feeling of fullness for longer, helping to support healthier eating habits and manage weight-related issues," said Dr. Mukherjea.

## Helps achieve academic potential

Importantly, a feeling of fullness also enables school-aged children to stay focused and attentive for longer. Ensuring your child eats a protein-rich breakfast and packing their lunch box with the right protein may be a useful tool in helping them to achieve their academic potential.

Adding soy at a meal or snack-time is easy and very child-friendly. There are many soy products available in the grocery store today that children will readily accept, including flavored soymilk, meat alternatives such as veggie burgers, soy-based yogurt, cereal with soy protein, and soy-containing baked goods such as bread.

### References:

1. The Medical Research Council of South Africa. *Chronic Diseases of Lifestyle in South Africa since 1995 - 2005 - Obesity in South Africa, Chapter 7*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.mrc.ac.za/chronic/cdlchapter7.pdf> [Accessed 23 March 2021].