

Lisa Geng

The Voice of Eating Well

Basic nutrition support for kids with apraxia, autism, and speech challenges

Many children with apraxia, autism, and other speech or developmental challenges are selective or picky eaters, which can make it harder to get all the nutrients they need every day. Essential nutrients are nutrients the body cannot produce on its own, so they must be consumed. These nutrients are the building blocks and tools the body uses for growth, repair, brain development, bone health, immune function, and overall health. When a child is on a restrictive diet or is a picky eater, some of these vital nutrients can be missing from the diet for days, months, or even years. When that happens, it can affect speech, focus, learning, brain health, behavior, growth, and overall development.

As a mom of two boys with special needs who are now thriving as adults, through my work with families since 2000 through the Cherab Foundation, and as coauthor of *The Late Talker*, I have seen again and again how much the right fish oil formula and consistent support with essential nutrients can matter, along with appropriate therapies. Essential nutrients provide the tools the body needs to help itself.

Fish Oils

When parents ask me which fish oils are actually working, I tell them not to assume all fish oils are the same. In my experience, the formula matters even more than the dosage. What has worked best in our nonprofit since 2000 is a formula higher in EPA than DHA, with a small amount of GLA. Over the years, many families have come to know this as the Cherab protocol, also known as the Lisa Geng protocol.

A simple place to start: Start with 1 capsule of Nordic Naturals ProEFA 369, then work up to 2 capsules, and then add 1 capsule of ProEPA if needed. I do not recommend going by the bottle dosage.

Per 1 capsule: ProEFA 369 = 135 mg EPA, 90 mg DHA, 35 mg GLA. ProEPA = 425 mg EPA, 100 mg DHA.

If using 2 ProEFA 369 + 1 ProEPA: Total = 695 mg EPA, 280 mg DHA, 70 mg GLA.

If Nordic Naturals is not available: Look for a formula higher in EPA than DHA, with a small amount of GLA. GLA can come from borage seed oil or evening primrose oil.

Why I usually recommend capsules: Capsules make it easier to lock in the serving size. Capsules do not need refrigeration and stay fresh for up to 2 years, while liquid fish oil needs refrigeration after opening and should be used within 3 months.

Special Diets

Some children may do well with individualized diet changes. At the same time, many children with special needs are already struggling to get enough variety and enough nutrients, so for many families the greater priority is making sure their child gets all the essential nutrients needed every day.

If major foods such as dairy are removed, they should be replaced thoughtfully so important nutrients that support bones, brain development, growth, and overall health are not lost.

Tips for Picky Eaters

Think small and practical. Sometimes it is not about changing the whole diet overnight, but about changing how a food is served. Mixing textures, changing shapes, varying temperature, and adding nutrition to foods and drinks a child already accepts can go a long way.

The goal is not to force, but to gently build comfort and acceptance over time.

Daily Essential Nutrient Support

Fish oils are only part of the picture. I also encourage families to think about consistent daily essential nutrient support, because many children are simply not getting enough variety day to day. One option I recommend is IQed, an all natural full meal and vitamin replacement protein powder I created as a mom to help my own children and have used in my nonprofit for over a decade. Today's food supply is contaminated with heavy metals and other toxins. Organic does not guarantee low heavy metals, because these contaminants can come from the soil, water, air, and even some farming inputs. Heavy metals are neurotoxins, and there is no safe level of lead in children.

IQed is patented, has received the Clean Label Project Purity Award, is third party tested free of heavy metals and 150 other environmental contaminants, and has a peer reviewed published study in which speech and communication were the biggest area of difficulty, and 85.7% reported improvement in expressive speech after supplementation.

A simple place to start: Ages 1–2: 1–2 scoops daily. Age 3: 2–4 scoops. Ages 4–8: 3–4 scoops. Ages 9 to adult: 4–6 scoops. For picky eaters, start with a very small amount in a food or drink your child already accepts and build gradually.

Clean Food, and What That Means

Good nutrition is not only about what is in food, but also what may be in it that should not be there. Even foods that are considered healthy or organic are not automatically low in contaminants. Helpful steps can include varying foods, washing produce, choosing products tested for contaminants when possible, using glass or stainless steel more often, and avoiding heating food in plastic.

About Lisa Geng

Lisa Geng is President of the Cherab Foundation, coauthor of *The Late Talker*, and mom of two boys with special needs who are now thriving as adults. This guidance reflects her 26 years supporting families through Cherab.

Please work with your child's pediatrician or qualified healthcare professional on diet changes and supplements, especially with feeding difficulties, food allergies, growth concerns, or other medical issues.