

THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE to FEEDING A CHILD WITH *Juvenile Arthritis*



The Foods We Focused On, The Foods We Removed, and
the Foundational Steps We Took to Support Healing



THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO FEEDING A CHILD WITH JUVENILE ARTHRITIS

The Foods We Focused On, The Foods We Removed, and the Foundational Steps We Took to Support Healing

By Starr Penn, CGC, FNCP

If Your Child Has JIA, Start Here

When my daughter Serafina was diagnosed with juvenile arthritis, I did what most moms do. I started searching for answers.

I wanted to understand why this was happening to her, what was contributing to the inflammation, and whether there was anything I could do beyond simply managing symptoms.

Food became one of the first places we started, and it became an incredibly important part of our journey. Many of the nutritional principles we used are rooted in the GAPS approach, and in this guide I'm going to show you the kinds of foods we fed Serafina and explain why we chose them.

But I want to make something very clear before we begin:

Healing is about much more than food.

Changing the diet without looking at the rest of the child can leave a lot of important pieces unaddressed.

Over the years, our approach expanded to look at the gut and digestion, nutrient status, potential infections and microbial imbalances, environmental exposures such as mold and heavy metals, the body's natural detoxification and elimination pathways, and the nervous system and stress response.

Those pieces eventually became part of the much larger framework I now teach inside The JIA Blueprint.

This guide is not meant to cover all of that.

This is simply your beginner's guide to the foods we use and why we use them.

I want you to understand what we are trying to accomplish with food, which foods we begin emphasizing, which foods we temporarily remove, and how nutrition can become one important part of supporting a child whose body is dealing with chronic inflammation.

Toward the end of this guide, I'll also show you where you can learn more about the bigger picture and the other areas we address inside The JIA Blueprint.

For now, let's start with the food.

Starr Penn, CGC, FNCP
Founder, The JIA Blueprint

<https://jiablueprint.com>

[Free JIA Blueprint Training](#)

What We Remove First, and Why

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we are not simply trying to make the diet “healthier.” We are trying to remove foods that may be irritating the gut, feeding imbalance, or keeping inflammation turned on while we begin rebuilding.

The first foods we usually look at are:

- Gluten
- Refined sugar
- Ultra-processed foods
- Industrial seed oils
- Artificial colors, flavors and preservatives
- Highly processed starches and packaged foods

For some children, we may also temporarily remove or reduce:

- Dairy
- Certain grains
- High-starch foods
- Foods that clearly trigger symptoms or digestive reactions

The goal is not to remove everything forever.

The goal is to create a calmer environment in the gut while we begin rebuilding digestion, nutrient status and tolerance.

Start here:

Look at the foods your child eats every single day. Begin with the biggest sources of gluten, refined sugar and packaged food, and start replacing those first.

What We Add First, and Why

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we do not simply remove foods and hope inflammation improves. We replace what we take away with foods chosen to support digestion, nutrient status, the gut barrier, connective tissue, and the body's normal repair processes.

This is where the **S.H.E.R. Method** begins to take shape: Seal, Heal, Eliminate, Rebuild.

Start With Meat Stock

Homemade meat stock is one of the first foundational foods we use.

Unlike long-cooked bone broth, meat stock is made with meaty bones, joints, skin, cartilage, and connective tissue and is cooked for a shorter period of time.

It provides gelatin, amino acids, minerals, and easily digested nourishment while also giving us a simple base for soups, vegetables, sauces, and meals.

Start with: a few spoonfuls or a small cup with meals and increase as tolerated.

Bring Back the Fat

One of the biggest differences families notice inside The JIA Blueprint is that we do not fear traditional animal fats.

We use foods such as:

- Ghee
- Butter when tolerated

- Tallow
- Fat naturally found on meat
- Egg yolks

Fat helps make meals satisfying and provides important fat-soluble nutrients. It also helps us move away from heavily processed foods without leaving a child hungry.

Prioritize Egg Yolks

Egg yolks are one of our favorite nutrient-dense foods when they are tolerated.

Rather than focusing only on protein, we are looking for foods that provide a broad range of nutrients in a form that is practical for a child to eat.

Yolks can be added to soups, meat stock, scrambled eggs, sauces, or other foods your child already accepts.

Cook Vegetables Gently

At the beginning, we generally favor vegetables that are peeled, deseeded when appropriate, and cooked until soft rather than relying heavily on raw salads and difficult-to-digest roughage.

The goal is nourishment without asking an already-stressed digestive system to work harder than necessary.

Add Fermented Foods Slowly

Fermented foods can be useful, but more is not better.

A child who is dealing with significant gut imbalance may need to begin with very small amounts, sometimes even just a little fermented vegetable juice rather than a full serving.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we pay attention to the child's response and build gradually instead of forcing a food simply because it is considered "healthy."

Your Action Step

Do not try to add everything at once.

This week, choose just **three foundational foods** to begin working into your child's diet:

1. Homemade meat stock
2. A traditional animal fat
3. One nutrient-dense food such as egg yolks, slow-cooked meat, or a small amount of fermented food

The goal is not perfection. The goal is to begin replacing foods that simply fill your child up with foods that actually bring something valuable to the table.

Why “Anti-Inflammatory” Isn’t the Same as Rebuilding

Many families start with an AIP diet, an anti-inflammatory diet, gluten-free eating, or another elimination-style approach. And sometimes they do see improvement.

That makes sense.

When you remove foods that may be irritating the gut or stimulating symptoms, you can lower part of the inflammatory load and give the body a little breathing room.

But symptom relief is not the same thing as addressing everything that may be contributing to the problem.

JIA is complex. Its exact cause is still not fully understood, and researchers believe genetics, immune regulation, environmental factors, infections, and even the gut microbiome may all play a role. Research is actively looking at how microbiome imbalances may influence JIA, but there is not one proven root cause that applies to every child.

That is why inside The JIA Blueprint, we do not stop at “eat anti-inflammatory foods.”

We use food to help create a better environment for healing while also looking at the bigger picture.

Why We Pay So Much Attention to the Gut

A large part of the immune system communicates with the gut, and the intestinal barrier helps control what is allowed to pass from the digestive tract into circulation.

When that barrier is disrupted, sometimes referred to as increased intestinal permeability or “leaky gut,” substances from the gut can interact with the immune system in ways that may contribute to immune activation.

That does **not** mean scientists have proven that toxins simply leak into the bloodstream, lodge in the joints, and directly cause JIA. JIA is more complicated than that.

But it does explain why gut health, digestion, the microbiome, and immune regulation are important areas of research and why we pay attention to them inside The JIA Blueprint.

Think of it like a damaged filter.

You can keep cleaning up what comes through the filter, and that may help temporarily. But if the filter itself is not functioning well, you also want to understand why and support the system around it.

That is why we eat this way.

The food is not simply designed to “fight inflammation.” It is intended to provide nutrient-dense, easier-to-digest foods while reducing potential dietary stressors and giving us a foundation from which we can look more deeply at the individual child.

And that is also why food is only one part of The JIA Blueprint.

What This Actually Looks Like on the Plate

Knowing what to remove and what to add is one thing. Knowing what to actually feed your child tomorrow morning is another.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we try to make meals simple, nourishing, and realistic enough that families can actually stick with them.

Breakfast

Instead of cereal, toast, waffles, or packaged breakfast foods, think:

- Eggs cooked in butter or ghee
- Egg yolks added to a warm cup of meat stock
- Sausage or leftover meat with cooked vegetables
- Avocado with eggs or meat
- A small serving of fermented vegetables on the side, if tolerated

Lunch

Lunch does not have to look like a traditional sandwich-and-chips lunch.

Try:

- Chicken salad made with a simple homemade mayonnaise
- Meatballs with soft cooked vegetables
- Leftover roast chicken or beef
- Soup made with homemade meat stock
- Lettuce wraps or simple grain-free wraps when appropriate
- Fermented pickles or sauerkraut alongside the meal

Dinner

Dinner is often the easiest meal to transition because many families are already cooking some version of meat and vegetables.

Think:

- Slow-cooked beef, chicken, lamb, or pork
- Plenty of the natural fat from the meat
- Soft cooked vegetables with butter, ghee, or tallow
- Homemade soups and stews
- Meat stock incorporated into sauces, soups, and vegetables

Snacks

One of the biggest shifts is moving away from constant grazing on crackers, chips, granola bars, and packaged snacks.

Better options might include:

- Hard-boiled eggs
- Leftover meat
- Avocado
- Homemade meatballs
- Fermented pickles
- Cheese or cultured dairy if tolerated
- Simple homemade snacks made from foods your child is already doing well with

The Biggest Mindset Shift

You do not need a completely different “kid food” menu.

One of the goals inside The JIA Blueprint is to gradually move the whole family toward real meals made from nutrient-dense foods.

Your child does not need twelve perfect foods on the plate.

Start with a protein, add a healthy fat, include a cooked vegetable or other tolerated whole food, and build from there.

The meals can become more creative over time.

The first goal is simply to begin changing what your child's body is being asked to work with every single day.

What If My Child Is a Picky Eater?

This is one of the biggest concerns parents have when they first begin changing their child's food.

"My child will never eat this."

"They only eat five foods."

"They live on crackers, pasta, cereal, bread, chicken nuggets, and snacks."

If that sounds like your child, you are not alone. I see this constantly with families entering The JIA Blueprint.

And one of the first things I want parents to understand is this:

Your child may not simply be "a picky eater."

Food preferences are influenced by much more than personality or willpower.

The Gut and Brain Are Talking All Day Long

The digestive system and the brain communicate constantly through what researchers call the **gut-brain axis**.

The microorganisms living in the gut are part of that conversation. They produce metabolites and interact with the immune, nervous, and endocrine systems, all of which can influence appetite, mood, digestion, and food preference.

When the gut microbiome becomes imbalanced, certain organisms may thrive particularly well in an environment rich in refined carbohydrates and fast-digesting sugars and starches.

That can create a cycle:

The child eats a diet high in refined starches and sugars.

That environment favors certain microbes.

Those microbes continue flourishing in that environment.

And the child may continue strongly preferring the same foods.

This does not mean that every food preference is caused by the microbiome. Sensory issues, neurodevelopmental differences, oral-motor challenges, previous feeding experiences, medications, and other factors can also contribute.

But it does mean that when a child seems almost driven toward the same processed carbohydrates over and over again, I do not automatically assume, “That’s just how they are.”

Their Current Palate Is Not Necessarily Their Permanent Palate

This is one of the most encouraging things I see inside The JIA Blueprint.

Parents often come in convinced their child will never eat differently because they have been eating the same limited foods for years.

Then we begin changing the environment.

We reduce the foods that continually supply large amounts of refined sugars and starches.

We begin introducing meat stock, quality proteins, traditional fats, egg yolks, cooked vegetables, fermented foods when tolerated, and other nutrient-dense foods.

We support digestion.

We work on the gut environment.

And gradually, the child's preferences can begin changing too.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, with consistent food changes along with my coaching, troubleshooting, and support through the transition, families often begin noticing meaningful changes in a child's palate within about **three weeks**.

That is not a guarantee that every child will suddenly eat everything in three weeks.

But it is long enough for many families to begin seeing an important shift:

Foods the child once demanded may become less important.

Foods they immediately rejected may become more acceptable.

Their range of tolerated foods may begin expanding.

And parents often realize that what looked like a permanently "picky child" was not necessarily permanent at all.

Do Not Change Everything Overnight

Understanding the microbiome does not mean we force a child to eat foods they cannot tolerate.

In fact, I usually do the opposite.

We create a bridge.

If your child eats chicken nuggets, we might begin moving toward homemade chicken pieces or meatballs.

If they eat pancakes every morning, we begin changing the ingredients rather than eliminating breakfast altogether.

If they like soup, we have an excellent vehicle for introducing meat stock, additional fat, egg yolks, vegetables, and slow-cooked meat.

If they already eat eggs, meat, avocado, or another whole food, we build from the foods that are already working.

The goal is to create successful experiences with food while the internal environment is changing.

Repetition Matters

Children often need repeated exposure to a food before it becomes familiar.

A refusal does not necessarily mean, “My child hates this.”

Sometimes it simply means, “This is unfamiliar.”

Serve very small amounts.

Do not make the new food the entire meal.

Put it beside something they already recognize.

Allow them to smell it, touch it, lick it, taste it, or take one bite.

Then offer it again another day.

You are helping the brain learn that this food is safe and familiar while also changing what is happening inside the gut.

Stop Thinking in Terms of “Kid Food”

One of the biggest changes we make is moving away from the idea that children need an entirely separate category of food.

Crackers, cereal, granola bars, nuggets, packaged snacks, and sweetened foods have become culturally accepted as “kid food.”

But children need the same building blocks adults need:

Protein.

Healthy fats.

Minerals.

Amino acids.

Fat-soluble vitamins.

Real food.

The goal is not to create a perfect eater.

The goal is to gradually teach the child’s body and palate to recognize real, nutrient-dense food as normal food.

Parents Still Lead the Transition

This is important.

We do not force-feed children.

But we also do not allow a child's current food preferences to determine the nutritional direction of the entire family.

The parent decides what food comes into the home and what is offered.

The child gets to have feelings and preferences about those foods.

Both can exist at the same time.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, I coach families through this transition because knowing what a child should eat and actually getting that food onto the plate are two completely different things.

We troubleshoot resistance.

We find substitutions.

We adjust textures.

We work around school, travel, birthday parties, sleepovers, sports, and real family life.

And we keep moving forward without expecting perfection.

The Most Important Thing to Remember

Do not look at what your child eats today and assume that is what they will eat forever.

Their microbiome can change.

Their palate can change.

Their tolerance can change.

Their relationship with food can change.

And in many families, that change begins much sooner than they expected.

[WATCH: Why Is My Child So Picky?](#)

How Do I Know If a Food Is Helping or Hurting?

One of the biggest mistakes families make is assuming that a food is “healthy,” so it must be good for their child.

That is not always true.

A food can be nutrient-dense, organic, homemade, and still be something your child is not tolerating well right now.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we pay close attention to the child’s response.

What We Watch For

A food reaction does not always look like an immediate stomachache.

Sometimes the clues are subtle.

After introducing a new food, watch for changes in:

- Joint pain or stiffness
- Swelling
- Energy
- Mood or irritability
- Sleep
- Bowel movements
- Gas or bloating
- Skin changes
- Headaches
- Congestion
- Appetite

- Food cravings
- Overall behavior

The goal is not to become afraid of food.

The goal is to become observant.

Introduce New Foods Slowly

When you introduce several new foods at once and something changes, you have no idea which food caused it.

That is why we often introduce foods gradually.

Add one new food.

Give the body a little time.

Watch what happens.

Then move forward.

This gives you useful information instead of leaving you guessing.

Dairy Is a Good Example

Dairy can be very nourishing for some children and problematic for others.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we do not automatically assume that every child needs to avoid dairy forever.

We look at tolerance.

Some children may do well with ghee but not butter.

Others may tolerate butter but react to milk.

Some may eventually tolerate cultured dairy such as yogurt or kefir better than conventional dairy.

The goal is not simply “dairy or no dairy.”

The goal is to determine what your child can handle at this stage.

Reactions Do Not Always Mean “Never Again”

Sometimes a reaction means the food is not appropriate right now.

That does not necessarily mean it will never be tolerated.

As digestion improves, the gut environment changes, and the body becomes more resilient, foods that were difficult earlier may become easier later.

That is why we think in terms of progression rather than permanent restriction.

Keep a Simple Food and Symptom Log

You do not need a complicated spreadsheet.

Write down:

- What new food was introduced
- How much they ate
- Any noticeable change over the next day or two

Patterns become much easier to recognize when you stop relying on memory.

The Goal

We are not trying to create the longest list of foods your child cannot eat.

We are trying to understand their current tolerance, reduce unnecessary stress on the body, and gradually expand the range of foods they can handle well.

That is very different from simply putting a child on a restrictive diet and leaving them there.

How to Start Without Overhauling Everything Overnight

One of the fastest ways to make this feel impossible is to try to change every food in your house in one day.

You do not need to do that.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we work in layers. The goal is to make changes that are meaningful enough to matter, but realistic enough that your family can actually sustain them.

Step 1: Remove the Biggest Offenders First

Start with the foods your child is eating most often that are working against what you are trying to accomplish.

For most families, that means beginning with:

- Gluten
- Refined sugar
- Ultra-processed foods
- Industrial seed oils
- Artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives

Do not get distracted trying to perfect every ingredient in the house.

Start with the foods your child eats every single day.

Step 2: Replace Before You Remove

If you take away every familiar food without having something ready to replace it, you create stress for everyone.

Before removing a staple, decide what is taking its place.

Bread might become eggs, meat, or another tolerated breakfast.

Crackers might become meatballs, hard-boiled eggs, avocado, or another simple whole-food snack.

Pasta might become a meat-and-vegetable meal or a tolerated alternative while you continue transitioning.

You are not just taking food away.

You are building a new normal.

Step 3: Add One Foundational Food

Choose one food that supports the direction you are trying to go.

That might be:

- Homemade meat stock
- Egg yolks
- Slow-cooked meat
- A traditional animal fat
- A small amount of fermented food

Do not wait until your entire diet is perfect before adding nourishing foods.

Step 4: Make Dinner Your Anchor Meal

Dinner is often the easiest place to begin because the whole family can eat the same basic meal.

Keep it simple:

Protein + healthy fat + cooked vegetable + something fermented if tolerated.

For example:

Roast chicken with buttered vegetables and a fermented pickle.

Ground beef cooked in tallow with zucchini.

Slow-cooked beef with carrots and meat stock.

Simple is fine.

Step 5: Stop Trying to Create a Perfect Menu

You do not need seven completely different breakfasts, lunches, and dinners every week.

In the beginning, repetition is helpful.

Find a handful of meals your child tolerates and your family can realistically prepare.

Then rotate them.

You can build variety later.

Your First Week

If you want somewhere concrete to begin, make this your goal for the next seven days:

Remove one major problem food.

Replace one processed staple with a real-food option.

Introduce one foundational food.

Cook one simple family dinner each day.

That is enough to begin.

The goal is not to transform your entire kitchen in a weekend.

The goal is to start moving in the right direction and keep moving.

A Simple Day of Eating

One of the questions parents ask me most is, “Okay, but what does my child actually eat?”

Here is a simple example of what a day might begin to look like as you transition away from processed foods and toward the foods we use inside The JIA Blueprint.

Breakfast

Eggs cooked in butter, ghee, or another traditional fat.

Add an extra egg yolk if tolerated.

Serve with avocado, sausage with simple ingredients, leftover meat, or a small cup of meat stock.

Lunch

Do not feel like lunch has to be a sandwich.

Try leftover chicken, beef, meatballs, or chicken salad made with homemade mayonnaise.

Add a soft cooked vegetable, avocado, or a fermented pickle if tolerated.

Dinner

Build the plate around a quality protein.

Add plenty of natural fat.

Then add one or two well-cooked vegetables.

Use meat stock anywhere you can: soups, stews, sauces, vegetables, or simply served warm alongside the meal.

Snacks

As meals become more nourishing, many children naturally need fewer snacks.

When they are hungry between meals, think food rather than “snack food.”

Try:

- Hard-boiled eggs
- Leftover meat
- Meatballs
- Avocado
- Fermented pickles
- Cultured dairy if tolerated
- A small cup of meat stock
- One of your homemade Blueprint-style treats when appropriate

The Formula I Want You to Remember

You do not need complicated recipes to begin.

Think:

Protein + traditional fat + cooked whole food + something gut-supportive when tolerated.

That simple formula can carry you through a lot of meals while you learn more.

And as we continue building this guide, I'll also show you how we handle foods like dairy, grains, fermented foods, fats, and some of the more nutrient-dense foods families often feel intimidated by at first.

[Free JIA Blueprint Training](#)

Why We Try to Eliminate Snacking

One of the biggest shifts we make inside The JIA Blueprint is moving away from constant grazing.

When children snack throughout the day, especially between lunch and dinner, they often arrive at meals only mildly hungry. That makes them much less interested in the nutrient-dense foods we actually want them to eat.

Research in children shows that snacking contributes a substantial amount of daily energy intake, and late afternoon is one of the most common snacking periods. More frequent snacking has also been associated with higher total daily energy intake.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we want meals to matter.

We want children to come to the table hungry enough to eat a real portion of meat, eggs, healthy fats, cooked vegetables, broth, and other rebuilding foods instead of filling up on snack foods two hours earlier.

That is why I often like dinner earlier than most families expect.

For many children, dinner around **3:00 or 4:00 PM** can work beautifully.

Instead of:

Lunch → snack → snack → late dinner they barely touch

We can create:

Breakfast → lunch → early dinner → small nourishing snack or shake later if genuinely hungry

That later snack might be something simple and nutrient-dense, such as a nourishing shake, egg, meat, avocado, cultured dairy if tolerated, or another food already working well for your child.

The point is not to rigidly control eating times.

The point is to protect your child's appetite for the foods that are doing the real nutritional work.

Create an Environment That Encourages Eating

The atmosphere around meals matters too.

Children are often eating under bright LED lights, with televisions on, phones nearby, noise, homework, and constant stimulation.

I like families to experiment with making dinner quieter and softer.

Turn off the bright overhead lights.

Dim the room.

Put away screens.

Light a few candles if it is safe and appropriate for your family.

Sit together.

Slow the meal down.

Research on lighting and eating behavior suggests that the dining environment can influence how people experience food and how much they consume, although the evidence is not strong enough

to say that candlelight itself will reliably make every child eat more.

So I do not use this as a “trick.”

I use it because a calm, low-stimulation environment can help a child settle into the meal, pay attention to hunger and taste, and make eating feel less pressured.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we are not only changing the food.

We are changing the rhythm around food.

The goal is simple:

Fewer eating opportunities.

More appetite at meals.

More nutrient-dense food when they do eat.

And a calmer environment that allows the child to actually sit, eat, and enjoy it.

The More Advanced Rebuilding Foods We Use

Once a child is tolerating the basic foods well, we begin layering in some of the more nutrient-dense foods we use inside The JIA Blueprint.

This is where the approach becomes much more than simply removing inflammatory foods.

We are trying to rebuild.

We want to provide the body with concentrated sources of protein, healthy fats, minerals, fat-soluble vitamins, fermented foods, and other traditional foods that can support digestion and overall nutritional status.

Cultured Dairy

If dairy is tolerated, we may gradually work through cultured forms such as:

- Homemade crème fraîche
- Yogurt
- Kefir
- Cultured cream
- Other traditionally fermented dairy foods

These foods are very different from simply adding conventional milk back into the diet.

Fermentation changes the food, lowers some of the lactose, and introduces beneficial microorganisms.

But we always pay attention to tolerance.

Some children do beautifully with cultured dairy.

Others need much more time before they are ready.

There is no prize for introducing a food before your child can handle it.

Fermented Vegetables and Tonics

We also use traditional fermented foods such as:

- Sauerkraut
- Fermented pickles
- Beet kvass
- Cabbage tonic
- Small amounts of fermented vegetable juice

These are introduced slowly.

Sometimes we begin with only the liquid from a fermented vegetable before introducing the vegetable itself.

The goal is not to overwhelm the digestive system.

The goal is to gradually expose the gut to a wider variety of traditionally fermented foods as tolerance improves.

Egg Yolks

Egg yolks are one of my favorite rebuilding foods because they are rich in healthy fats, choline, and fat-soluble nutrients.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we gradually increase egg yolks as tolerated.

Some children come into the program already eating eggs easily.

Others cannot tolerate them at first.

That is okay.

We build slowly.

Egg yolks can be worked into:

- Meat stock
- Soups
- Smoothies
- Custards and homemade desserts
- Scrambled eggs
- Sauces and other foods

The important part is not hitting a magic number overnight.

The goal is to gradually increase nutrient density in a way your child can actually tolerate.

Liver and Organ Meats

Liver is one of the most nutrient-dense foods available, which is why traditional diets valued it so highly.

It provides nutrients such as:

- Vitamin A
- B vitamins
- Iron
- Copper
- Choline
- High-quality protein

Ways families often make liver easier include:

- Shaving a small amount of frozen liver into soups or meat stock
- Mixing liver into ground beef or meatballs
- Blending a small amount into pâté
- Mixing it into meat dishes where the flavor is less noticeable

For children who dislike the taste, some families also freeze tiny pieces and swallow them like small food “pills,” as long as the pieces are small enough to swallow safely.

Because liver is so concentrated, we still introduce it gradually and pay attention to the individual child.

Want the Exact Recipes and Measurements?

If you would like to see exactly how we make some of these lesser-known foods we use inside The JIA Blueprint, including things like beet kvass, cabbage tonic, cultured foods, and other traditional recipes, you can get my book here:

Get the Book on Amazon

[It's Not 100 Different Diseases](#)

Why We Use These Foods

The goal inside The JIA Blueprint is not simply to make inflammation quieter.

It is also not simply to remove gluten, sugar, or another food and call the job finished.

We are trying to improve the quality of the raw materials the body receives every day.

That means gradually replacing foods that are nutritionally empty with foods that provide:

- Amino acids
- Healthy fats
- Minerals
- Fat-soluble vitamins
- Collagen and gelatin
- Fermented foods
- Nutrient-dense proteins

This is what I mean when I say we are rebuilding from the bottom up.

We remove what may be working against the body.

We support the gut.

And then we deliberately bring in the foods that help nourish the child as deeply as possible.

Slowly.

Strategically.

And according to what that individual child can tolerate.

The Daily GAPS-Style Shake We Use

One simple way we add extra nutrition without turning every meal into a project is with a daily shake.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, I often use a GAPS-style shake as a way to bring together fresh vegetable juice, healthy fats, egg yolks, and other tolerated foods in one place.

This is not meant to replace meals.

It is simply another tool for getting concentrated nutrition into a child who may still be building tolerance for some of these foods.

Basic GAPS-Style Shake

Start with freshly pressed juice made from vegetables your child tolerates well.

A simple combination might include:

- Carrot (1-2)
- Beet (½-1)
- Green Granny Smith Apple (½ -1)

Then add:

- 1–2 raw or pasteurized egg yolks, building gradually as tolerated
- A ¼ C of crème fraîche, yogurt, or kefir if dairy is tolerated
- Avocado or another tolerated healthy fat for creaminess

Blend until smooth

As your child progresses, this can become one of the easiest places to add additional egg yolks or other nutrient-dense foods without making the meal feel overwhelming.

Start Slowly

Do not throw every ingredient into the shake on day one.

If your child is new to fresh juice, fermented foods, raw egg yolks, or cultured dairy, introduce them one at a time.

That way, if your child reacts to something, you have a much better idea of what caused it.

When We Use It

This can work well later in the day after an early dinner, especially if your child is genuinely hungry.

Instead of going back to crackers, cereal, or packaged snacks, the shake gives you another opportunity to provide real nutrition.

The goal is always the same:

Fewer empty calories.

More nutrient density.

And more opportunities to rebuild the body with the foods we actually want our children eating.

This can be a great option later in the day, especially if you begin serving dinner earlier.

If your child eats a solid dinner around 3:00 or 4:00 PM and gets genuinely hungry again around 6:00 PM, this shake can be a perfect evening option.

It gives them something nutrient-dense without turning the evening into another round of crackers, cereal, or packaged snacks.

Just try not to serve it too close to bedtime.

Because of the fresh juice and the amount of liquid, giving it too late may mean your child needs to get up during the night to use the bathroom.

So think of it as an early-evening nourishment option, not a bedtime drink.

Why Traditional Animal Fats Matter

One of the biggest differences families notice inside The JIA Blueprint is that we do not fear fat.

In fact, traditional animal fats are an important part of how we nourish and rebuild.

We regularly use foods such as:

- Butter
- Ghee
- Tallow
- The natural fat on meat
- Egg yolks
- Cream and cultured dairy when tolerated

Why We Use Them

Fat helps children feel satisfied after meals.

It also helps the body absorb fat-soluble vitamins such as vitamins A, D, E, and K.

Healthy fats are also important building blocks for hormones, cell membranes, the brain, and the nervous system.

For children who have been living on crackers, cereal, bread, pasta, and other fast-burning carbohydrates, adding more quality fat can help meals feel much more substantial.

Instead of constantly needing another snack, they are more likely to stay full between meals.

Fat Helps Us Increase Nutrient Density

A child does not need to eat a huge volume of food to get a lot of nourishment.

Adding butter to vegetables, yolks to stock, tallow to ground beef, or crème fraîche to a shake can significantly increase the nutritional value of a meal without requiring the child to eat twice as much food.

This is especially useful for children who have poor appetites or who are still transitioning away from processed foods.

We Are Not Talking About Industrial Oils

The fats we emphasize are very different from the highly processed seed oils commonly found in packaged foods.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we focus on traditional fats that have been used in cooking for generations rather than heavily refined oils.

Start Simply

You do not need to pour fat over everything overnight.

Begin by changing what you cook with.

Use butter, ghee, or tallow instead of industrial seed oils.

Keep the natural fat on meat.

Add an extra yolk where you can.

Use cultured cream or crème fraîche when tolerated.

These small changes can make meals more nourishing, more satisfying, and much more aligned with the rebuilding work we are trying to do.

Why Protein and Connective-Tissue Foods Matter

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we do not just focus on getting enough protein.

We also focus on the parts of the animal that provide collagen, gelatin, connective tissue, skin, cartilage, and the amino acids the body uses for repair.

That is why we use foods such as:

- Meat stock
- Slow-cooked meats
- Meaty bones and joints
- Chicken skin
- Beef shanks
- Short ribs
- Oxtail
- Gelatin-rich cuts
- Homemade meatballs and ground meats
- Eggs and egg yolks

Why These Foods Are Different

A chicken breast or piece of steak gives your child protein.

But when we include skin, joints, connective tissue, and slow-cooked cuts, we are also getting more of the collagen-rich parts that are usually missing from the modern diet.

Those foods provide amino acids such as glycine and proline, which the body uses throughout connective tissue and normal repair processes.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, that matters because we are not simply trying to remove foods that may be contributing to inflammation.

We are also trying to give the body better raw materials.

This Is Why Meat Stock Is Foundational

Meat stock gives us an easy way to include gelatin-rich nourishment without requiring a child to eat a large amount of food.

We use it as:

- A warm drink
- The base for soup
- The liquid for cooking vegetables
- The base for sauces and gravies
- Something to add egg yolks or other nourishing foods into

It becomes one of the easiest foods to work into the diet consistently.

Use the Whole Animal More Often

Modern diets tend to focus heavily on lean muscle meat.

Traditional diets used much more of the animal.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we gradually bring some of that back.

Keep the skin on the chicken.

Choose slow-cooking cuts.

Save the juices and fat from the meat.

Use bones, joints, and connective tissue for stock.

Do not automatically trim every bit of fat and connective tissue away.

Keep It Practical

You do not need exotic recipes.

A slow cooker can do most of the work.

Put in a roast, chicken thighs, beef shanks, or another collagen-rich cut with simple vegetables and seasonings.

Cook it until it is tender.

Save the broth.

Use the leftovers.

Then turn the leftovers into soup the next day.

This is one of the easiest ways to make nutrient-dense eating practical for a real family.

The Goal

We are trying to move away from a diet built mostly around processed carbohydrates and isolated foods and toward meals that actually provide the materials a growing body needs.

Protein matters.

But the quality, variety, and nutrient density of that protein matter too.

Why Nutrient Density Matters More Than Just “Eating Healthy”

A child can eat a diet that looks healthy on paper and still be missing many of the nutrients needed for growth, repair, immune function, and recovery.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we are not just asking, “Is this food healthy?”

We are asking:

How much nourishment is this food actually giving the body?

That is the difference between simply eating clean and deliberately rebuilding.

Some of the Most Nutrient-Dense Foods We Use

We regularly focus on foods such as:

- Egg yolks
- Liver and other organ meats
- Slow-cooked meats
- Meat stock
- Sardines and other small oily fish when tolerated
- Shellfish when tolerated
- Cultured dairy
- Fermented foods
- Well-cooked vegetables
- Traditional animal fats

These foods provide combinations of nutrients that are difficult to get from highly processed foods or from a diet built mostly around lean protein and vegetables.

Why Minerals Matter

Minerals are involved in nearly every system in the body.

They help support:

- Bone health
- Muscle function
- Nerve signaling
- Energy production
- Enzyme activity
- Hydration
- Normal growth and development

This is one reason I do not want families simply removing food.

Every time we take something out, we need to be thinking about what we are putting back in.

Restriction without rebuilding can leave a child eating fewer and fewer foods without actually becoming better nourished.

This Is Why Liver, Yolks, and Seafood Matter

Foods like liver, egg yolks, sardines, shellfish, and cultured dairy are extremely nutrient-dense.

They can provide nutrients such as:

- Vitamin A
- B vitamins

- Choline
- Iron
- Zinc
- Selenium
- Copper
- Iodine
- Fat-soluble vitamins
- Omega-3 fats

Not every child will tolerate every one of these foods right away.

That is fine.

We build gradually.

The goal is not to check every food off a list.

The goal is to slowly increase the amount of real nutrition your child is getting from every bite.

Think Quality Over Quantity

A child does not need to eat huge portions if the foods they are eating are highly nourishing.

A few egg yolks, some slow-cooked meat, a little liver worked into a meal, a cup of meat stock, and properly prepared vegetables can provide far more nutritional value than a full plate of foods that simply fill the stomach.

That is one of the biggest shifts we make inside The JIA Blueprint.

We stop asking only:

“Did they eat enough?”

And start asking:

“Did what they ate actually nourish them?”

[Free JIA Blueprint Training](#)

Why We Remove Grains and Starches During Gut-Healing Work

One of the biggest differences between The JIA Blueprint and simply “going gluten-free” is that we often look beyond gluten alone.

A gluten-free diet can still be very high in starch.

Gluten-free breads, crackers, cereals, pastas, chips, rice products, potato starch, tapioca, cassava, and other substitutes may remove gluten, but they can still leave a child eating a diet that is heavily based on rapidly digested carbohydrates.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we are trying to do more than swap one processed starch for another.

Why We Remove Them

When digestion and the gut microbiome are already out of balance, large amounts of fast-digesting starch can continue feeding the same environment we are trying to change.

That is one reason we temporarily reduce many grains and starches while we focus on:

- Meat stock
- Protein
- Traditional fats
- Egg yolks
- Fermented foods
- Cultured dairy when tolerated

- Well-cooked vegetables
- Nutrient-dense whole foods

The goal is not to create a permanently low-carbohydrate diet.

The goal is to give the digestive system a different environment while we work on rebuilding.

Gluten-Free Does Not Automatically Mean Gut-Friendly

This is an important distinction.

A package can say:

Gluten-free

Organic

Non-GMO

Vegan

Natural

and still be mostly starch, sugar, gums, and processed ingredients.

That may be useful as a temporary bridge food, but it is not the same thing as the nutrient-dense foods we are ultimately trying to build the diet around.

What About Rice, Potatoes, and Other Starches?

This is where the individual child matters.

Some children tolerate certain starches better than others.

Some need a longer period without them.

Others may reintroduce them sooner as digestion, bowel movements, energy, and overall tolerance improve.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we do not think in terms of “never again.”

We think in terms of:

What does this child tolerate right now?

What is helping us move forward?

And when is the body ready for more variety?

The Goal Is Reintroduction, Not Permanent Restriction

A healing diet should not become a smaller and smaller list of foods forever.

As the gut environment changes and the child becomes more resilient, we want to expand.

We want more variety.

We want more flexibility.

We want the child to be able to participate in normal family life without needing an extremely restrictive diet indefinitely.

That is why the final step of the S.H.E.R. Method is **Rebuild**.

We remove strategically.

We nourish deeply.

And then, when the body is ready, we begin adding foods back.

What About Dairy?

Dairy is one of those foods that can be incredibly nourishing for one child and problematic for another.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, I do not look at dairy as simply “good” or “bad.”

I look at the form of dairy, how it is prepared, the condition of the gut, and how the individual child responds to it.

We Do Not Use Conventional Dairy the Way Most Families Do

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we are not building the diet around conventional milk.

The dairy we use is generally cultured or fermented.

That may include:

- Ghee
- Butter
- Whey
- Homemade crème fraîche
- Yogurt
- Kefir

Culturing changes the food before your child ever eats it.

Fermentation begins breaking down some of the lactose and alters the dairy in a way that can make it easier for some children to digest and tolerate.

Some children come into The JIA Blueprint and can begin using cultured dairy fairly quickly.

Others cannot tolerate it at all in the beginning.

That is okay.

Sometimes the Gut Needs More Support First

If a child is reacting to dairy, we do not simply keep pushing it because dairy is nutritious.

We back up.

We continue working on digestion, sealing and supporting the gut, changing the microbial environment, and improving overall tolerance.

Then we revisit it.

This is something we work through together week by week inside The JIA Blueprint until the child is ready for the next step.

Cultured dairy is extremely nutrient-dense once it is tolerated, so the goal is not necessarily permanent avoidance.

The goal is to build enough resilience that the child can eventually enjoy a wider variety of nourishing foods.

The Same Is Often True With Eggs

Some children arrive unable to tolerate eggs.

That does not mean we automatically assume eggs are gone forever.

We support the gut, work on the bigger picture, and reassess tolerance over time.

Many food sensitivities and intolerances can change as digestion and the gut environment improve.

True food allergies are different and should be handled with the child's medical professional rather than tested casually at home.

Healing Should Lead to More Food, Not Less

This is important.

The goal of The JIA Blueprint is not to leave a child on an extremely restrictive diet forever.

As the child becomes more resilient, we begin expanding the diet.

That includes foods such as:

- Potatoes
- Rice
- Beans and lentils when appropriate
- Properly prepared grains
- Breads and baked foods
- Nuts and seeds
- Other starches

But we do not necessarily bring them back in the same form they were eating before.

Whenever possible, we use traditional preparation methods such as soaking, fermenting, sprouting, and slow preparation to make these foods easier to digest.

That may mean sourdough-style breads rather than conventional bread, properly soaked or fermented grains, and starches introduced gradually rather than becoming the foundation of the diet again.

The Goal Is Reintroduction

We remove foods strategically when the gut needs a break.

We nourish and rebuild.

Then we expand.

Ultimately, I want our children eating a broad, flexible, nutrient-dense diet rather than living on an increasingly small list of “safe” foods.

That is one of the clearest signs that we are moving in the right direction.

What to Keep in the Kitchen

One of the easiest ways to make this way of eating feel overwhelming is to wait until you are hungry and then try to figure out what to make.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, I want families to have a handful of foundational foods ready all the time.

That way, meals become much simpler and you are less likely to fall back on packaged foods because there is nothing else available.

Proteins

Keep a few easy options on hand:

- Ground beef
- Chicken thighs
- Whole chicken
- Slow-cooking cuts of beef
- Eggs
- Meatballs
- Leftover roast meat
- Sardines or other tolerated seafood

Do not underestimate leftovers.

A lot of lunches inside The JIA Blueprint are simply yesterday's dinner reheated.

Traditional Fats

Keep these easy to reach:

- Ghee
- Butter if tolerated
- Tallow
- Fat saved from cooking meat
- Egg yolks
- Crème fraîche when tolerated

These make it much easier to increase nutrient density without having to create another entire dish.

Foods for Meat Stock

Try to keep some combination of:

- Meaty bones
- Joints
- Skin
- Cartilage
- Chicken backs or wings
- Beef shanks
- Oxtail

Make a batch, refrigerate what you will use over the next few days, and freeze the rest in smaller portions.

That way you are not starting from scratch every time.

Vegetables

Choose vegetables your child tolerates and that are easy to cook until soft.

Good basics might include:

- Carrots
- Zucchini
- Squash
- Green beans
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Onions
- Garlic
- Beets

You do not need twenty different vegetables in the refrigerator.

Pick a few your family will actually eat and rotate them.

Fermented and Cultured Foods

As tolerated, keep:

- Sauerkraut
- Fermented pickles
- Beet kvass
- Cabbage tonic
- Homemade yogurt
- Kefir
- Crème fraîche

These are foods we introduce gradually, not foods you need to consume in large amounts immediately.

Easy Foods for a Hungry Child

This is where planning really matters.

Instead of reaching for crackers or cereal, have simple options ready:

- Hard-boiled eggs
- Meatballs
- Leftover chicken
- Avocado
- A cup of meat stock
- Fermented pickles
- Cultured dairy if tolerated
- Your GAPS-style shake

A Simple Weekly Prep Routine

You do not need to spend all weekend meal prepping.

A few things make the entire week easier:

Make one large pot of meat stock.

Cook one slow-cooked meat.

Prepare a batch of meatballs.

Boil some eggs.

Wash and prep a few vegetables.

Make sure you have your fats, fermented foods, and simple grab-and-eat foods ready.

When those basics are already in the refrigerator, feeding your child this way becomes much more practical.

The Goal

You are not trying to build a Pinterest-perfect kitchen.

You are trying to make the foods you want your child eating easier to reach than the foods you are trying to move away from.

That one change makes a huge difference.

Food Is Foundational, But It Is Not the Whole Blueprint

Everything in this guide matters.

The foods we remove matter.

The foods we add matter.

The way we prepare food matters.

The way we rebuild the gut matters.

But I want to be very clear about something:

The JIA Blueprint is not a diet program.

Food is one of the foundations, but it is not the whole picture.

Inside The JIA Blueprint, we also look at the other things that may be contributing to why a child's body is struggling in the first place.

That can include:

- Underlying infections or microbial imbalances
- Mold and environmental exposures
- Heavy metals and other toxic burden
- Digestion and nutrient absorption
- Bowel movements and elimination
- Liver and bile support
- Nervous system dysregulation
- Stress and emotional load
- Sleep
- Household chemicals and environmental inputs
- Functional testing when appropriate

Every child is different.

That is why I do not believe in handing every family the exact same checklist and expecting the same outcome.

Some children need more gut support.

Some need more help with elimination.

Some need deeper work around the nervous system.

Some need us to look more closely at environmental exposures.

Some need testing to help us understand what is going on underneath the surface.

And most need a combination of things.

This Is Why The JIA Blueprint Is So Personalized

We use the food as a foundation.

Then we look at the child in front of us.

We look at their symptoms.

Their history.

Their digestion.

Their environment.

Their tolerance.

Their progress.

And we adjust as we go.

That is the difference between following a diet and actually having a blueprint.

The goal is not simply to get your child eating differently.

The goal is to understand what their body needs and build from there.

Where to Go From Here

If you have made it this far, you already understand something important:

Food matters tremendously, but food is only one part of the bigger picture.

The changes in this guide are designed to give you a practical place to begin. You can start removing the foods that may be working against your child, begin adding more nutrient-dense foods, support the gut, improve digestion, and start rebuilding from the bottom up.

But inside The JIA Blueprint, we go much deeper than food alone.

We also look at the other areas that may be contributing to why a child's body is struggling in the first place, including:

- Underlying infections and microbial imbalances
- Detoxification and elimination
- Nervous system regulation
- Mold and environmental exposures
- Heavy metals and other toxic burden
- Digestion and nutrient absorption
- Functional testing when appropriate
- The child's individual history, symptoms, tolerance, and progress

Every child is different, which is why the Blueprint is not a one-size-fits-all protocol.

The food gives us a foundation.

Then we look at the child in front of us and determine what needs attention next.

Want to Understand the Rest of The JIA Blueprint?

If you would like to learn more about the other pillars we address inside The JIA Blueprint, how we look for the deeper contributors to chronic inflammation, and how the program is structured to support families through the process, I created a free training that explains the bigger picture.

Watch the Free JIA Training

[Free JIA Blueprint Training](#)

A Final Note From Me

If you take nothing else from this guide, I want you to remember this:

You do not have to change everything at once.

Start with the food in front of you.

Make the next better choice.

Add the next nourishing food.

Pay attention to how your child responds.

Then keep building.

This is not about perfection. It is about creating a different environment in the body, one choice at a time.

That is exactly how we approach the work inside The JIA Blueprint.

I hope this guide gives you a clearer place to begin and helps you feel more confident about what to do next.

Starr Penn, CGC, FNCP

Founder, The JIA Blueprint

<https://jiablueprint.com>

