

## **ADD/ADHD**

It can be overwhelming to hear that your child has concentration, learning or behavior challenges. Thankfully, natural medicine has many options for treating ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). These include nutrition, supplements, herbs, craniosacral therapy, lifestyle changes and homeopathy. It's important to individualize treatment because every child is so different.

According to Dr Amen, a holistic psychiatrist who has written the Book "Healing ADD", and has successfully treated thousands of cases, there are six subtypes of ADD. Each subtype needs different herbal and nutritional support. At our clinic we use his subtyping technique to prescribe specific nutritional supplements such as grapeseed extract, carnitine, B6, magnesium, phosphatidyl serine, zinc, and stronger nutrients such as GABA, inositol, taurine, 5HTP, and L-tyrosine.

One supplement that is used for all types of ADD is cod liver oil 3-4 grams (1-2 tsp) daily. This is because it is high in natural vitamin A, and the essential fatty acids literally help our brain cells to connect. Many parents and teachers notice a difference within two weeks of fish oil supplementation. It is vital, however, to get a brand that is molecularly distilled because otherwise fish oil can be contaminated with heavy metals and PCB's. Good brands include Nordic Naturals (strawberry, peach, orange), Carlson's (lemon) and Designs for Health.

Homeopathy is another wonderful approach to mental concentration and behavior issues in children. In homeopathy, a diluted substance is used to prompt the child's system to rebalance itself. Homeopathy does require a longer appointment because it is details about a child (their fears, food cravings, nature etc) that help the practitioner to find the right remedy. But the time spent is well worth it. I personally have seen incredible transformations in children with ADHD after they have taken the right homeopathic remedy. A wonderful book in this area is "Ritalin-Free Kids" by the Reichenberg-Ullmans which gives real life scenarios and provides both hope and tools for coping with ADD/ADHD.

It is also worth doing some tests to rule out other factors that may be contributing to the ADD/ADHD. Some conditions I will check for include anemia, magnesium deficiency, sleep apnea and food sensitivities. Heavy metal testing is especially important because heavy metals such as mercury and lead are such a common cause of behavior disorders in children. It is amazing to see how thinking improves once the metals are out! Removing heavy metals must be supervised by a qualified practitioner who is used to treating children.

Diet and lifestyle recommendations for ADD and ADHD are often overlooked, despite the clear powerful influence they can have on a child's health and wellbeing. Perhaps we avoid these simple changes because it takes more work to change what we eat and how we live than to simply take a supplement. But

our bodies are entirely composed of what we eat, drink and breathe, and our minds are affected on every level by our lifestyle. Few things can have as positive and lasting an effect on a child than permanently improving diet and lifestyle.

One of the best diet changes to start out with is to stabilize your child's blood sugar through small frequent meals, foods lower in the glycemic index (eg. proteins, healthy fats) and avoidance of candy and dessert. When a child has a sugar high from PopTarts or Fruitloops at breakfast, and then a sugar low at 10am, adrenaline is released in their body. Adrenaline can literally cause hyperactivity. In Appleton Central Alternative Charter High School for kids struggling in conventional settings, "Natural Ovens" began a healthful meal program for breakfast and lunch. Vending machines selling candy, soda, and chips were removed. The result? Better academic performance, fewer behavior problems, less fighting and less drug use.

My first lifestyle recommendation is often regular physical exercise. This helps to burn off steam, improve sleep quality, and increase focus. Exercise is the single best way to increase blood flow to the brain. Outdoor activities and activities involving coordination such as yoga, eurythmy, dance, sports, tai chi and martial arts are especially helpful. As well, it is important to minimize activities that aggravate hyperactivity such as video games, computer games & tv viewing. All of these work to shorten attention span and decrease focus.

Sleep is essential for good mood, focus and concentration. Increase your child's total sleep by having an earlier bedtime, a bedtime routine, massage, and herbs if needed. Craniosacral therapy will often help calm the nervous system and cause children to sleep better.

Lastly, it is helpful to have special direct parent-child play time with your child. Aim for 15 minutes daily. Allow the child to pick the activity such as a game, dance, singing, biking and running. This is not time for teaching, chores or homework and it should happen regardless of previous misbehavior. This is time for positive, fun attention.

ADD and ADHD seem to be more widespread every year. As a parent of an ADD/ADHD diagnosed child there are so many effective ways to help your child deal with their challenges. By approaching treatment as a family, and learning together about what works best for your child, you can truly boost their self esteem, and teach them coping strategies for life in general. Once a child discovers that they can overcome this deeply frustrating disorder, they will gain a real confidence in themselves, and their ability to overcome any challenge that life brings.

