

Making Sense of ADHD

(And How to Address It, Naturally)



The condition known as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has been assigned as a diagnosis to children and adults alike. Up to 9% of teens and 4% of adults have shown signs and common symptoms associated with a diagnosis of ADHD: difficulty concentrating, impulsiveness, inability to sit still and excessive energy.

Sub categories that have been names in association with ADHD are Hyperactive-Impulsive or Inattentive, and a combination of these two, aptly named Hyperactive-Impulsive and Inattentive.

Much can be known about this confusing and controversial condition to help clear up uncertainty. I will attempt to provide some information about the symptoms and causes of these behaviors, as well as some options for treatments that could fully handle this condition.

The severity of ADHD symptoms and the level it wreaks havoc on the lives involved vary widely. Some common manifestations of this condition are:

- Inability to sit still, difficulty concentrating
- Easily distracted, doesn't listen, inability to follow instructions, memory loss
- Difficulty in completing tasks
- Ineffective organizational skills
- Speaks quickly or incessantly, restless
- Behaves with impatience or anxiety, or has highly emotional outbursts or extreme mood swings
- Emotional outbursts, prone to anger

As a result of the above, the individual may also have low tolerance of others, including surroundings and situations they are involved in, as well as unstable personal relationships. As many of these indications are uncomfortable for one to experience, there also exists a heightened risk for addiction, not only to drugs prescribed specifically for this condition, but also other prescription or illegal drugs, and alcohol.

Symptoms can begin to manifest in children as young as 7 years old, but can also appear anytime during adolescence or after. Untreated, these symptoms can escalate into far worse unwanted and disruptive behaviors.

Drugs have commonly been used to address this disorder, but have been proven to be linked to delayed growth, decreased appetite, heart problems and sleep issues. Not only that, the most prevalent drugs prescribed for ADHD are Ritalin and Adderall, both of which have had devastating side effects like extreme personality changes, extreme mood swings, hallucinations, muscle twitches, high blood pressure and suicidal or other disturbing thoughts, including inflicting harm on others.

Ritalin is a stimulant for the central nervous system and can cause the very symptoms it's prescribed to address: nervousness, agitation, and anxiety, and Adderall is known to be highly addictive.

Thankfully, there are options to address these symptoms that do not include drugs, but instead focus on understanding how these symptoms can surface and then providing proper diet, lifestyle changes and vitamin supplements to allay the discomfort.

Understanding the origin of onset of the above behaviors and symptoms can provide enlightenment to the possibilities of eradicating it completely. The following are some chosen behaviors that have been linked to this disorder.

1. Smoking

Smoking during pregnancy has been connected to the development of ADHD in children. Second hand smoke in the home of a child has also been a contributing factor to the onset of ADHD.

2. Diet and Digestive Health

Chemical food additives, artificial sweeteners, high fructose corn syrup, processed foods that contain GMO's (Genetically Modified Organisms), wheat, refined sugar and unknown food allergies or sensitivities can invite the onset of ADHD. Environmental exposure to lead, arsenic or other substances can also play a part.

3. Brain injury

Experiencing a traumatic brain injury can result in attention deficits and memory problems, impulsive behavior and "acting out".

4. Genetics

Some individuals have had a genetic link, though the question remains as to whether the genetic predisposition is due to being exposed to behaviors and symptoms, or because one is raised with a similar diet.

Luckily, aside from physical injury, these ADHD contributors can very possibly be mitigated, with the erratic consequences avoided altogether.

Natural treatment for these symptoms, once they are present, include activities, lifestyle choices and supplements that provide increased energy, feelings of vitality, greater sense of well-being, and a happier disposition, NOT the side effects that prescribed drugs come with.

With that in mind, there are some food choices that will make matters worse for ADHD sufferers:

1. Sugar

Energy drinks, fruit juices, sodas or any other sweetened beverages can wreak havoc on the blood sugar of a child, or an adult. We'll take up caffeine separately.

2. Gluten

Gluten is a protein found in wheat and grains. It's sticky and holds ingredients together, mostly in things like bread, pasta, crackers, cereal, salad dressings or other processed foods, and lunch meats. It causes internal inflammation, is linked to belly fat, chronic pain, increased risks for diabetes, heart disease and some forms of cancer.

Some symptoms of gluten allergy or sensitivity are: iron deficiency/anemia, depression or anxiety, canker sores, an itchy skin rash, bone or joint pain, arthritis, or migraines. Abdominal pain, cramping, diarrhea, constipation, vomiting, irritability, dental and enamel defects and ADHD itself are other symptoms.

Cutting gluten out of the diet completely can have very positive changes on the whole family.

3. Dairy

Cow's milk contains a substance called A1 casein, which can trigger similar symptoms as a gluten allergy. Studies have shown that when conventional dairy was removed from children that were exhibiting ADHD behaviors, they improved.

Alternatives are other milk sources that do not contain casein, or the many dairy alternatives that provide other health benefits, such as milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream containing almond or coconut milk.

4. Caffeine

Caffeine not only can produce hyperactive behavior, but has been linked to insomnia, anxiousness, anger, violence, and other ADHD characteristics. Energy drinks have a plethora of sugar and caffeine, and should be promptly removed from the diet, of children and teens especially.

5. Food coloring, dyes, MSG, Nitrates and Artificial Sweeteners

All of these additives provide their own contributions to ADHD. Almost all processed food contains coloring or dyes that can have damaging effects, hyperactivity being only one. Sauces, gravies, deli meats, salad dressings and spices contain MSG (a yeast extract), which lower dopamine levels and throw off balances in feelings of pleasure, leading to impulsiveness and abnormally heightened activity levels.

Nitrites are found in practically every processed and canned food, and lunch meat and cause anxiousness and restlessness, and increase the risk for cancer, diabetes and IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome). Artificial Sweeteners are unnatural substances added to create the appearance of sweetness, but instead cause increased heart rate, dizziness, headaches, memory loss, not to mention cancer, obesity and infertility. Using natural sweeteners in moderation is clearly the answer.

6. Soy, Food Sensitivities, Allergies

Soy is one of the most common food allergens in the world, causing hives, tingling, wheezing, and abdominal pain. Soy has been known to disrupt thyroid function and hormone levels. Other food allergens including peanuts, shellfish, wheat, dairy and eggs should be removed from any diet where ADHD is being treated or suspected.

Luckily, the situation for coping with ADHD is not hopeless. On the contrary, there is much that can be done, as seen by the above information about what can contribute to its presence. Stable information provided by research points to greater prevalence and risk of acquiring symptoms of ADHD when one's diet is high in sweets, fried foods, salt and unnatural additives, caffeine and gluten.

A well-balanced diet, basically the opposite of the above, can help alleviate symptoms and help regain control over the behaviors and personality traits found in those diagnosed with ADHD.

1. High Protein, High Iron Foods

Grass fed organic beef, free-range chicken, eggs, wild fish, and raw or non-dairy items should be staples in the diet of any child or adult, but especially those dealing with ADHD. Eggs, for example, are packed with 7 grams of protein, essential amino acids and omega-3 fatty acids. Chicken and other poultry balances serotonin levels, controlling impulsive and aggressive behavior.

2. Foods Containing B Vitamins, Omega-3

B Vitamins, especially B-6 is essential for proper brain function and, because it regulates the production of dopamine and serotonin, it's been shown to be more effective for improving hyperactivity in children than Ritalin. Salmon and tuna, rich in Omega-3 positively affects cognitive function, behavior and learning.

Supplements are a must when dealing with ADHD and the below have been proven to help.

1. **Fish Oil & Omega-3 Complex** have been linked to improved learning with less educational or behavioral problems, including better reading and spelling, and reduces anxiety and depression.
2. **Zinc** deficiency in the body can manifest itself in poor attention span, motor-control disorders and poor neurological function. Adding foods rich in minerals such as dark greens, wild salmon and beans will help.
3. **Serotonin** levels that are too low are directly related to impulsive and aggressive behavior.
4. **Probiotics** missing in the body can cause digestive problems. As sugar, some water, antibiotics and exposure to common environmental chemicals kill healthy bacteria, a probiotic supplement will ensure a high level of good bacteria to ward off the bad.
5. **B-Complex** vitamins increase concentration, lessen stress and fatigue, balances hormones and energy and improves focus.

6. **Gamma-Amino Butyric Acid (GABA)** assists for a healthy central nervous system, calming nerves and blocking impulsive behavior.

In addition to eating the right food, avoiding the symptom triggers, and taking proper supplements, there are behaviors and lifestyle choices that can also successfully treat ADHD.

1. **Proper Sleep** – At least 8 hours of sleep per night, with more for younger children, will go a long way in alleviating symptoms of insomnia or restlessness, and providing a better quality of life.
2. **Eating a Healthy Breakfast** – Making sure protein is ingested for breakfast will keep blood sugar in check, and will stabilize hormones.
3. **Exercise** – Balanced hormones and an increase in feelings of happiness and well-being make exercise well worth the effort, not to mention a greater ability to concentrate.
4. **Stability balls** – using these balls as chairs increases attention levels and decreases hyperactivity. Having one at home for you and your children will definitely help.
5. **Essential Oils** – lavender or other essential oils dripped into a bath, used in diffusers, applied directly to the skin or soles of the feet at bedtime, or dripped lightly onto a favorite stuffed animal can improve mood and lower anxious or nervous behavior.
6. **Neurofeedback** – Having the ability to watch brain activity can provide the information needed to see where and how that individual can better control his thoughts and actions.

Above all, ADHD and the symptoms associated with it, can be helped naturally without drugs. Call us and make an appointment today. We will help determine the exact combination of adjustments, supplements, lifestyle changes and food staples that will best handle your own particular situation.

Our children are worth it. Let's give them the happiest, most stable life possible.

We wish you a happy, healthy and energetic future!

Dr. Dana Ballerini
Ballerini Chiropractic
1442 Irvine Blvd, Suite 101
Tustin, CA 92780
714 544-3900
www.ballerinichiropractic.com