

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Claudia Anrig, DC

ADHD used to be known as attention-deficit disorder, but was renamed ADHD in 1994 and broken down into three subtypes, each distinctive with their own pattern of behaviors: an inattentive type, a hyperactive-impulsive type and a combined type.

While every child diagnosed with ADHD will not act the same, there seems to be a pattern of behavior that is being seen more frequently. In the 1990s there were about 900,000 children being treated for ADHD with Ritalin. Today that number is more than 5 million. It's time to find out what is causing such a dramatic rise in the number of diagnosed cases of ADHD.

Contributing Factors

While no one has, of yet, been able to determine the exact cause of ADHD, there has been much speculation as to the contributing factors. These factors include: genetic and environmental links, smoking during pregnancy, premature delivery, low birth weight, birth injuries, excessive television watching, diet, nutrition and allergies. Much of this has to be considered as pure speculation, but recent studies are proving that one particular area is adding up to be more than just conjecture.

Diet, Nutrition and the Busy Family

Unfortunately, in today's busy families, it's not unusual to see that healthy meals prepared at home are the exception and not the rule. In some nutritional circles, the "fast" or "box" food has led to a "toxic food environment." Fresh fruits, vegetables, poultry, fish and whole-grain products are no longer a part of the standard diet. With this processed-food approach, parents might not realize the excessive amounts of preservatives, artificial flavors and colors their children are consuming.

The Trouble With Food Coloring

In a recent article published in *The Lancet* medical journal, researchers at Southampton University in England reportedly have found a link between food dyes and hyperactive behavior in children. Professor Jim Stevenson and his colleagues published their results based upon the examined effects of additives on 153 children age 3, and 144 children ages 8 and 9.

The children were divided into three groups, two of which were given one of two drinks that contained a different combination of food colorings and sodium benzoate. The third group was given a placebo that contained no food coloring or preservatives.

This double-blind, placebo-controlled study determined that those artificial colors and the preservative sodium benzoate (or both) in a child's diet result in increased hyperactivity.

In response, Susan Jebb, nutrition scientist at Britain's Medical Research Council added, "Such additives are most likely to be found in foods that we would like to see children eating less of (i.e., soft drinks, confectionery, and so on) and so it reiterates the general healthy eating messages of encouraging healthier food choices."

A Natural Approach

A study done at Harvard Medical School, in their neuropsychology post-graduate program, tested 20 children who had been diagnosed with ADHD. Ten were treated with Ritalin, the most commonly prescribed drug. The other 10 were treated with dietary supplements. The results were compared using the most popular neurological tests, including IVA/CPT and the WINKS analysis. The tests revealed that the subjects in both groups showed significant and essentially identical improvements.

These studies suggest that the majority of neurological symptoms ascribed to ADHD can be attributed to food and additive allergies, heavy-metal toxicity and other environmental toxins, low-protein/high-carb diets, thyroid disorders, mineral imbalances, essential fatty-acid deficiencies, amino acid deficiencies and B-vitamin deficiencies.

The dietary supplements used were a mix of vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients, amino acids, essential fatty acids, phospholipids and probiotics that attempted to address the ADHD biochemical risk factors. These findings support the effectiveness of food-supplement treatment in improving attention and self-control in children with ADHD, and suggest that food-supplement treatment of ADHD may be equally effective to Ritalin treatment.

Dietary Recommendations

Chiropractors and other health care professionals agree that diet plays a vital role in a child's health and well-being. In your family wellness practice, consider providing the following recommendations:

- Do not allow children to drink soft drinks. These chemical concoctions contain artificial food coloring, additives and preservatives.
- Eliminate baked products. These items contain high quantities of bleached flour and sugar, both of which wear down a child's immune system and overtax their digestive system.
- Limit fast food. The only healthy option is to avoid it all together, but if this isn't possible, then limit it to once a month.
- Encourage eating at least four servings of vegetables and one serving of fruit every day. Fruit is an important part of your child's diet, but fresh vegetables contain more of the vitamins and minerals children need.
- Eat whole grains and protein-rich foods. A diet that is high in protein and healthy carbohydrates will give children the energy they need without over-working and over-loading their bodies.
- Don't forget the omegas. This is vital for supporting the child's concentration.
- Promote all-natural as much as possible. Avoid foods that have been treated, processed, packaged, colored, flavored or pasteurized.

The Chiropractic Factor

Although there are no studies to support the role of chiropractic care in the life of the ADHD child, many parents report a vast improvement in their child's ADHD symptoms in conjunction with regular chiropractic care. My experience from a clinical perspective is that I have definitely seen the positive role that chiropractic care can play in the life of the child with ADHD.

Resources

1. McCann D, Barrett A, Cooper A, et al. Food additives and hyperactive behaviour in 3-year-old and 8/9-year-old children in the community: a randomised, double-blinded, placebo-controlled trial. *Lancet*, Nov 3, 2007;370(9598):1560-7. Available at www.thelancet.com.

2. *Alternative Medicine Review*, Aug. 2003;8(3):319-30.
3. Agency: Food Coloring May Stimulate Kids. Available at www.food.gov.uk.

DECEMBER 2007