

ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS FOR ADD AND ADHD

Home remedies and more unusual alternatives for the treatment of attention deficits (ADD) and hyperactivity (ADHD) are abundant. Before using the stimulants generally recommended for the disorder, people who are leery of medication may want to try other approaches. Although some are deserving of serious consideration, they should not be used to avoid needed medication or counseling that can help manage problems. For general information and statistics on treatment alternatives, see *Beyond Ritalin* by Stephen Garber, Marianne D. Garber, and Robyn F. Spizman (Harper Perennial, 1994), pp. 187–197. The pros and cons of various procedures follow:

REDUCING SUGAR

Reducing sugar intake should always be examined. Some people find that excessive use of sugar definitely aggravates symptoms of ADD and aggression, though others find that the amount of sugar consumed makes little difference. There is some research that shows a physical basis for the sugar effect. Eating sugar may cause people with ADHD to increase production of the hormone cortisol, released by the body during stress. Sometimes sugar may prevent proteins from reaching the brain. Sugar may generally be better tolerated when people consume adequate amounts of protein.

FOOD ADDITIVES AND SUPPLEMENTS

Avoiding artificial flavorings, food coloring, and preservatives was thought to be an important treatment of ADHD in the 1970s. Over the years, there has been little evidence to support these claims. Individual cases can vary and it may be important to watch the effect certain food additives have on behavior. Following strict diets can be very challenging for parents and children. For more information, contact The Feingold Association, 127 East Main Street, Suite 106, Riverhead, NY 11901, 516-369-9340, www.feingold.org.

Omega 3 fish oils can be used to reduce deficits in fatty acids. Some people report that this supplement improves attention and folklore has always proposed that fish is “brain food.” However, the amount needed to improve ADHD is not clear. There are medical tests for deficits in fatty acids. Excessive thirst, frequent urination, dry skin, strawlike hair, dandruff, and small bumps on arms, thighs, or elbows are also signs of the problem. This complex nutritional approach is further explained in *Miracle Cures* by Jean Carper (HarperCollins, 1997).

Herbs from grape seeds and pine bark (Pycnogenol) have been marketed as a treatment for ADHD. Although more research has been done on Pycnogenol, it is twice as expensive as grape seeds and it has the same active ingredient. Improvements in symptoms of ADHD could be related to the herb’s ability to regulate enzymes that control dopamine and norepinephrine levels, which may be unsynchronized in ADD. Like stimulants, reduction in symptoms should be seen in 15 minutes and last about four hours. Therefore, if this approach has any benefits, they should be readily observable. The suggested dose is 20mg of the active ingredient (OPC) per 20 pounds of body weight for children and 40mg/20 pounds for adults. Further information can be found in *Miracle Cures* by Jean Carper (HarperCollins, 1997).

NEUROFEEDBACK

Neurofeedback, a form of biofeedback, uses EEG training to increase the strength of brainwaves common in alert states and suppress the strength of brainwaves that operate during sleep states. Increasing the strength of “alert” brain waves could increase blood flow, strengthening the ability to inhibit impulses and movement and filter distracting stimuli. The use of neurofeedback training was started in the 1970s, and research in the 1990s has shown some promise for this approach. However, it may take 20–40 sessions to

produce results, and this can be expensive when not covered by insurance. For more information contact EEG Spectrum, 161 Ventura Blvd., Suite 3, Encino, CA 91436-2505, 800-789-3456, www.eegspectrum.com.

ANTIMOTION MEDICATION

Antimotion medication used to treat ADD is based on the theory that a malfunctioning vestibular system (inner ear and balance center) may cause a shortage of energy in the cerebellum. If misshapen inner ear filters block the flow of neural impulses to the cerebellum, a state of sensory deprivation could be created that causes fidgeting. Vestibular problems might be especially suspect when people have motion sickness, coordination problems, difficulty reading, sloppy writing, poor sense of direction, or sensitivity to sound. Further information can be found in the book *Total Concentration* by Harold N. Levinson (M. Evans and Co, 1990). Although Dr. Levinson cites cases in which antimotion medications such as Antivert, Marezine, and Dramamine and antihistamines such as Benedryl and Dimetapp can help ADD, there has been little research to support this.

EXERCISES

Meditation and relaxation exercises can be very helpful for anxiety disorders and other emotional problems. However, people who need to be moving all the time can find attempts to be still excruciating. Those who have only ADD may respond well to the focusing techniques of meditation. Proponents of kinesiology and therapies that use acupressure points suggest specialized postures, breathing, and tapping that can help ADHD people become more organized and focused. For more information, contact Fred Gallo, 40 Snyder Road, Hermitage, PA 16148, 724-346-3838, www.energypsych.com, or Callahan Techniques, 45350 Santa Rosa, Indian Wells, CA 92210, 760-345-4737, www.tftrx.com.

ADDITIONAL READING

- *Hyperactivity Hoax* by Sidney Walker (St. Martins, 1998) explores how problems ranging from metabolic and genetic disorders to heart conditions, infections, anemia, brain cysts, hearing and vision problems, and toxic exposure can cause ADD symptoms.
- *Ritalin-Free Kids: Safe and Effective Homeopathic Medicine for ADD and Other Behavioral and Learning Problems* by Judyth Reichenberg-Ullman, Robert Ullman, and Edward Chapman (Prima Publishing, 1996) cites success stories and explains the homeopathic approach to ADD and other disorders.