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Can Nutrition Help Kids with ADHD?

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Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is the most common neurological disorder among children, accounting for over 35% of all medical referrals to psychiatric clinics. In North America, it affects about six million kids and the rate appears to be increasing, as statistics showed a 22 percent jump in ADHD cases from 2003 to 2007.¹ Although a few medical researchers believe it may be over diagnosed and over treated, ADHD remains a challenging disorder for both children and their families.

Kids with ADHD have trouble concentrating, act impulsively and have difficulty remaining still. It can dramatically impact their academic performance and social status among peers.

For reasons that are still undetermined, boys are more likely to be diagnosed with this disorder, and are prescribed medication three times more often than girls. Recent studies also indicate ADHD may have a pivotal role in the development of other chronic health conditions. For example, insomnia and other sleep disturbance problems appear more often in children with ADHD.

A study published in the journal *Sleep* showed 17 percent of ADHD adolescents suffered insomnia compared to 7 percent of teens without this disorder and the research indicates these sleep problems may extend into adulthood.² Lack of sleep also exacerbates attention and concentration problems.

No cure for ADHD exists, although it can be managed with the assistance of qualified healthcare and education professionals. Current treatment methods may include behavioral therapy and/or medication. The exact cause of ADHD remains unclear, but genetics, diet and environment may influence the emergence of this disorder.



QUESTION:

What is the percentage of psychiatric referrals for ADHD?

- A) 10%
- B) 22%
- C) 35%

ANSWER:

C) 35%

TRUE OR FALSE:

The common Western diet may double the risk for ADHD

ANSWER:

True

QUESTION:

Which mineral may help reduce ADHD symptoms?

- A) Calcium
- B) Magnesium
- C) Selenium

ANSWER:

B) Magnesium

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ADHD & Nutrition

Many parents of ADHD children are looking for an alternative— or a reduction – to medication. Changing to a healthier diet may reduce symptoms for some kids.

Medical research points to Western society's indulgence of processed food, often high in refined sugar and low in nutrients as a possible cause of ADHD. Food additives and coloring are also suspects. Research published in the *Journal of Attention Disorders* reveals the common Western diet doubled the risk for developing ADHD. This may be the result of the low levels of nutrients in this food.³

Some experts also recommend testing ADHD kids for gluten intolerance and, if they test positive, removing gluten food products from their diet.

Switching ADHD children to a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and fish may provide a way to reduce the symptoms.

Research indicates omega 3 fatty acids found in fish are excellent for optimizing the health of the brain and nervous system. In particular, DHA, or docosahexaenoic acid, seems especially influential on proper brain function for memory and learning. Choose fish that have low mercury levels, such as anchovies, mackerel and wild salmon.

While more research needs to be conducted on this subject, a study that appeared in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* noted that ADHD “subjects with lower compositions of total n-3 fatty acids had significantly more behavioral problems,

temper tantrums, and learning, health, and sleep problems than did those with high proportions of n-3 fatty acids.”⁴

Missing Minerals May Make Impact

A mineral that may be important for reducing ADHD symptoms is magnesium. It is involved in hundreds of chemical reactions in the body. Unfortunately, magnesium deficiency is common in the Western world. When you have low levels of the mineral, your nervous system can become agitated and overexcited.

A French study on ADHD children revealed those that received a combination of magnesium and vitamin B6 over eight weeks achieved substantial improvement in attention and other cognitive functions. When they no longer received this nutritional combination, the children's ADHD symptoms returned.⁵

Another mineral that may help with ADHD is zinc. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* revealed that zinc levels of ADHD kids were 43 percent lower than children in the placebo group.⁶

* * *

It is preferable to have your child get required nutrients through his or her diet. If your child is a finicky eater, supplements may fill the nutritional gap -- consuming a good quality multivitamin may help ADHD kids achieve optimal nutritional levels. However, you should always consult your chiropractor or pediatrician before providing your child with vitamins, herbs or other supplements.

Quote to Inspire

“One reason so few of us achieve what we truly want is that we never direct our focus; we never concentrate our power. Most people dabble their way through life, never deciding to master anything in particular.”

Tony Robbins

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