

AWAKENING TO ADHD



Children with **ADHD** act without thinking, are **hyperactive** and have **trouble focusing**. They may understand what's expected of them but have trouble following through because they **can't sit still**, **pay attention** or **attend to details**. All children are **inattentive**, **hyperactive** or **impulsive** sometimes, but in ADHD these behaviours are more severe and occur more often. The good news is that with proper treatment, children with ADHD can manage their symptoms, succeed at school, and lead productive lives.



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ADHD has increased by at least 400% over the past 20 years. Research suggests that it is the most prevalent childhood 'psychiatric' disorder in South Africa.¹ The Hyperactivity/Attention Deficit Support Group of South Africa estimated in 2004 that 10% of all South African children may have characteristics associated with ADHD. However, no official statistics are available.

WHAT IS ADHD?

ADHD is a collection of symptoms including inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. There is no single test to diagnose the disorder, and many other problems, such as anxiety, depression and certain types of learning disabilities, can have similar symptoms. ADHD is diagnosed when a certain number of symptoms occur in a particular combination.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition (DSM-IV), uses three main criteria for the current definition of

ADHD. Each criterion has a list of symptoms that need to have been present for at least 6 months before an ADHD diagnosis can be made.² There must also be clear evidence of clinically significant impairment in functioning, socially, at school or at work. The criteria are:

Inattention. For example, the child often has trouble keeping attention on tasks or does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.

Hyperactivity. For example, the child often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms when sitting still.

Impulsivity. For example, the child often has trouble awaiting his turn or interrupts others.

Children who have at least six symptoms of inattention are described as having ADHD, Predominantly Inattentive Type. Children who have at least six symptoms in some combination of hyperactivity and impulsivity

are described as having ADHD, Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type. Children who meet both of these requirements are considered to have ADHD, Combined Type.

PSYCHIATRIC DISORDER OR NEUROLOGICAL DISORDER?

While ADHD continues to be thought of as a psychiatric disorder, Kenneth Bock, in his book *Healing the New Childhood Epidemics*,³ puts forward the theory that this is a diagnostic error. Instead, he suggests that ADHD is a neurological disorder. This is because the

plastic chemicals (phthalates) to ADHD. This research is alarming, given that these compounds might have contaminated much of the food chain. In addition, two papers were published last year linking ADHD to lead toxicity.⁴

- **Malnutrition.** The average intake of essential nutrients has declined steadily since the early 1980s, and eating unhealthy food has increased. Children (and their parents) rely on fast foods, processed foods and ready meals. Obesity is an obvious

‘The brain does not function in **isolation**. It’s a team player. It needs **vital nutrients** as well as informational **input**.’

brain does not function in isolation. It’s a team player. It needs vital nutrients as well as informational input. To fulfil these needs, the brain depends on complex interactions between the immune, endocrine and gastro-intestinal systems. Anything that compromises these interactions and metabolic processes will affect the brain.

Three of the main factors that disrupt these complex interactions are the following:

- **A high toxic load.** Our environment is crammed full of chemicals, hormones and antibiotics that were unheard of 50 years ago. Our water supply has become increasingly polluted with hydrocarbons, pathogens and waste materials. Several recent research reports have linked both pesticides and

result, but the subtle metabolic damage caused by low nutrient intake is of more concern with regard to ADHD. Without the right nutrients, the body cannot protect itself properly.

- **Impaired detoxification.** Damage to two important detoxification processes, known as methylation and sulphation, means that toxins such as mercury and lead that enter children’s bodies from the environment are likely to stay there. Circulating toxins interfere with neurological function.

CONVENTIONAL TREATMENT VERSUS THE BIOMEDICAL APPROACH

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neurotransmitter dopamine, which is associated with attention and energy. While Ritalin may be effective in some children, it acts as Band-aid only. It's therefore not uncommon for children on Ritalin also to be prescribed antidepressants or other psychotropic medications because the Ritalin has not addressed the complex breakdown of communication between the immune, endocrine and gastro-intestinal systems. ADHD is rarely a stand-alone condition. Children with ADHD will often have symptoms relating to other systems, such as asthma, eczema, diarrhoea, constipation, low immunity or ear infections.

The biomedical approach is a science-based, molecular-biological approach to treating

children with ADHD and other behavioural challenges. The aim is to address the underlying health problems through diet, nutritional supplements, identifying hidden allergies, treating the gut, and detoxification.

This approach to ADHD is based around four elements:

■ **Reduction of environmental toxins** includes following an organic diet as much as possible and avoiding any potential allergens – both foods and environmental. In addition, any underlying infections (fungal, viral, bacterial or parasitic) need to be treated.

■ **Dietary modifications.** Several diets may be effective in managing symptoms in children with ADHD, particularly with regard to reducing inflammation. It is essential to work with a qualified practitioner to find the most suitable diet for your child.

■ **Nutritional supplementation.** Nutritional supplements in ADHD should only be prescribed once both symptoms and the results of laboratory testing have been analysed. There is no one-size-fits-all prescription. It's also essential that supplements be hypo-allergenic and designed specifically with children in mind.

■ **Detoxification** starts with supporting and healing the gastro-intestinal tract. After this, both methylation and sulphation should be supported.

Parents need to be made aware at the outset that because ADHD is so complex, diagnosis and treatment are neither easy nor quick. A great deal of devotion, time, patience and hard work is required, and the strains upon financial and emotional resources may be great.

Two critical aspects of biomedical intervention

Taking a history. The first step in biomedical evaluation consists of preparing a thorough family and child health history in the form of an extensive questionnaire followed by a consultation. These histories often provide important clues. For instance, is there a family history of auto-immunity or allergies? Are there indications of viral infection or heavy metal toxicity? Is anyone else in the family affected by ADHD?

Testing. Several tests determine the direction the journey of healing will take. It's not advisable to go blindly into a healing programme, as each child is different. Before you allow your doctor to write you a prescription for an ADHD drug, you must insist that he or she runs the following basic laboratory tests:

- full blood count
- basic blood chemistry
- lipids
- thyroid function (including TSH, T₃ and T₄)
- fasting glucose.

Problems picked up by any of these tests (for example, anaemia) may well have an impact on your child's ability to concentrate.

Once the basic tests have been done, further nutritional and metabolic tests can reveal nutritional deficiencies and excesses that are often the root cause of serious problems. They also reveal metabolic dysfunctions that can cause ADHD-type symptoms. These tests should be ordered and analysed by a practitioner with experience in nutrition as well as other aspects of biomedical intervention, and are as follows:

- stool analysis
- food allergy tests
- amino acid analysis
- organic acid analysis

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- fatty acid analysis
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The essentials of dietary modification

All biomedical diets involve some sort of dietary manipulation or restriction.

- Free-range or organic nutrient-dense foods must be eaten. Children with ADHD should not be given tuna or swordfish, as both have a high mercury content which puts strain on an already compromised detoxification system. Meats that have been treated with hormones and antibiotics should be avoided. Foods treated with herbicides and pesticides should also be restricted. Wholesome foods have an extraordinary ability to restore proper metabolic function.
- Allergenic foods should be removed from the diet. These include foods that may cause more subtle reactions of food sensitivities and food intolerances, for example, gluten and casein. Intolerance or inability to digest these foods adequately can lead to behavioural symptoms.
- Foods that cause yeast to proliferate, including baked goods and aged cheeses, must be avoided. Excess yeast, or candida, harms the digestion and increases the toxic burden.
- Carbohydrates should be limited in order to stabilise the blood sugar. Blood sugar imbalance and, more seriously, insulin resistance, can trigger ADHD-type symptoms.

The essentials of supplementation therapy

Therapeutic supplementation forms an important part of any treatment programme and is likely to include some of the following:

- **Detoxifying supplements.** Methyl-B-12, folic acid and DMG are important

for restoring the detoxifying process of methylation.

- **Metabolism-supporting supplements** such as multivitamins, antioxidants and essential fatty acids are essential for kick-starting the body's repair.

- **Metabolic supplements.** Acetyl-L-carnitine and coenzyme Q10 stimulate healthy function of energy-deprived cells in the body and brain.

- **Herbal supplements** help kill fungi, parasites and bacteria that attack the gastrointestinal tract and nervous system.

- **Probiotics** help restore proper digestion, reduce inflammation and control yeast overgrowth.

- **Brain-supporting supplements.** Phosphatidylcholine and amino acids improve both thought processes and mood.

CONCLUSION

ADHD has become a catch-all diagnosis into which the medical system too often tosses children who suffer from complex metabolic dysfunctions. In fact, it has many causes and various remedies. As a parent, you should never feel pressurised into giving your child an ADHD drug like Ritalin. Ritalin cannot treat anaemia, insulin resistance or mitochondrial dysfunction, and it can't take the place of a nourishing diet. There are alternatives out there – don't be afraid to find them. ●

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