

Pure Facts

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How can parents help their ADHD child?

In the controversy over whether or not to use medication, some important issues are often ignored.

Focus on Mom

How Mom feels is important! Raising any child is challenging, but raising a child with ADHD symptoms can be overwhelming; how can anyone be a good parent under these stressful conditions? What makes matters worse is that we have found when a child has ADHD symptoms, at least one of his parents shares these traits as well. Mom will have a hard time parenting if she is experiencing the symptoms at the same time as her child.



The practice of blaming mothers for nearly everything has gone on for decades. At one time, autism was believed to be the result of cold, uncaring mothers, and asthma was said to be caused by overprotective moms. *Editor's note:* Yes, of course, there are bad parents out there, but I have found that the ones who struggle with the option of giving their child a drug are the best parents, not the worst.

Listen to your child

One size doesn't fit all; each family is unique, children are unique, and a therapy that works well for one child might not be a good fit for another.

If your child is on a prescription, find out how he feels.

Does it improve any of these?

- 1) The child's self-esteem and social interaction with other children.
- 2) His ability to learn. And is he able to retain the information he has learned while he is on it?
- 3) His quality of life.

In other words, is he happier? This seems to be the case for Lucas, the little boy described in the article on page 4.

Or is the effect similar to what another mom found? — also on page 4.

Does the drug cause:

- 1) Physical discomfort?
- 2) Unwanted thoughts or feelings, like his real self is not good enough?
- 3) Side effects like sleeplessness, depression, or lack of appetite?

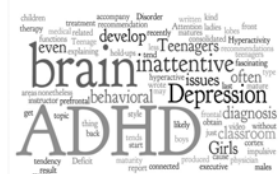
Does the child resist taking the prescription, and if so, why? Have you tried taking one of the pills? If your doctor cautions you not to do this, ask why.

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Is ADHD a disorder or a collection of symptoms?

Research shows that symptoms of ADHD can be triggered by many things. They include: food additives, salicylates, too little sleep, celiac disease, sensory dysfunction, lead exposure, lack of beneficial bacteria in the gut, and the side effects of a medicine, as well as a deficiency in zinc, iodine, or other nutrients. Just being the youngest in a class has been found to increase the chance of a child being given an ADHD label.

The belief that it is a disorder, that the problem always exists within the child and not in the environment, implies that parents cannot identify and address the causes. But many thousands of parents have done just that, and their children no longer have the troublesome symptoms.



Neuroscientist Bruce Perry argues that ADHD is not a real disease. He notes, "It is best thought of as a description. If you look at how you end up with that label, it is remarkable because any one of us at any given time would fit at least a couple of those criteria."

The Feingold Association of the United States, Inc., is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1976. The program is based on a diet eliminating synthetic colors, artificial flavors, aspartame, and the preservatives BHA, BHT and TBHQ. Our mission is to increase public awareness of the effects of foods and additives on behavior, learning and health.

Special focus on drugs for ADHD

How can parents help? *from page 1*

Review what you have already done

Parents often believe they have “tried everything” to help their child, but this is rarely the case. “Getting rid of food dyes” or “cutting back on additives” is not the same as a trial of the Feingold Program, using the information that has been developed over the past 40 years. If it were easy to do this on your own, there would be no need for our support group.

Behavior modification techniques can be helpful, but they work best for the child who is actually capable of controlling his actions. Children who are in the throes of a reaction are not able to control themselves any more than the person who has consumed too much alcohol. (You can’t talk someone out of being drunk!)

If you’ve already tried charts with stars and they haven’t helped, it may be time to look elsewhere.



Consider this

If a normal child eats an abnormal substance (such as a petroleum-based additive), why wouldn’t he behave in an abnormal way? Can Cheetos, Kool-Aid and Froot Loops *really* be called food? If a human can thrive on a steady diet of synthetic chemicals, wouldn’t *that* be abnormal?

A child with celiac disease can have ADHD symptoms, but is the best option to add chemicals to his system or to remove gluten? And if his hyperactive behavior is due to a lack of sleep, isn’t the solution obvious?

Many things you can do

Take the steps you believe are needed, but at the same time, don’t overlook other options such as adding nutrients, a trial of removing milk, or looking into sensory therapy. There are supplements that have been found to work as well as drugs, especially omega-3 essential fatty acids. And there are a number of supplements now available that are specifically designed to reduce ADHD symptoms. Magnesium and zinc can make a big difference in a child’s behavior and ability to learn and so can an antioxidant like pycnogenol. All of these are beneficial for most people. (But if you use more than a modest amount, it is best to do so under the guidance of a qualified health care professional.)



Even if your child is taking medicine for ADHD, he still needs to eat and will still be exposed to chemicals in his environment, but, happily, it isn’t hard to minimize possible problems. Be alert for things that could be setting your child off. Something as simple as getting rid of plug-ins and scented candles and switching to a fragrance-free laundry detergent can make a difference.

As you do your grocery shopping, reject any product that has fake sweeteners (such as aspartame or Splenda) and fake dyes (such as Red 40, Yellow 5, etc.) This will result in a higher quality of food for your entire family.

If you eat out, consult the Feingold Association’s *Fast Food and Restaurant Guide*. The ingredients in most restaurant foods are shocking, but there are a growing number of good alternatives for eating out.

Focus on the doctor

Ask your child’s doctor to take a look at the studies that have tested non-drug options for treating ADHD symptoms. You will find brief abstracts of the major research on the Feingold Association’s web site (www.feingold.org). Print them out and take copies to the professionals who will be working with your child. If the doctor is unwilling to listen to your concerns, he/she might not be the best person to help you.

Has your doctor told you that there could be harmful side effects from ADHD drugs? If he/she is unaware of the “black box warning” required to be included with the medicine, then there is a problem. If the practitioner is aware of this information and does not share it with you, then there’s another problem.

If you opt for using medicine for your child, find a professional who will be able to help you in the event there are unwanted side effects.

We believe that parents and patients deserve to have complete, accurate information on all of the options available, that they should be able to choose the option that is the most comfortable for them, with the physician to advise them if and when needed.

“Just eat real food,” advises Dr. Jessica Hutchins of the Cleveland Clinic. “Food dyes ... have definitely been shown to increase hyperactivity in a subset of children. There are countless case reports in the biomedical autism/ADHD community of behavior improving with removal of the dyes.” She asks, “What is the harm in demanding better quality nourishment for our kids?”