

ATTENTION-DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a condition that affects children. Children with ADHD may be more active and/or impulsive than what is usual for their age. ADHD can affect in excess of 5% of school going children. It characterised by disruptive behaviour, poor attention span, restlessness, sleeplessness, excitability and unpredictability. At school, the child may have difficulty following instructions, paying attention to work or play activities or prove to be easily distracted. He or she may appear not to listen and can frequently interrupt people or run or climb inappropriately. ADHD usually starts at about 18 months but the condition should not be confused with normal energetic childhood behaviour.

What causes ADHD?

Children who have ADHD do not make enough chemicals in key areas in the brain that are responsible for organising thought processes. Without enough of these chemicals, the organising centres of the brain don't work well. Research shows that ADHD is more common in children who have close relatives with the disorder. Certain food colourings, too much sugar, food allergies or too much television have **not** been proven to contribute to ADHD.

What is the medical approach?

There is no simple screening process to identify people carrying genes that increase susceptibility to ADHD. Consult your doctor for advice if you find your child difficult to live with or if his/her behaviour is interfering with school work. Your doctor may have forms or checklists that you and your child's teacher and several people who know your child can fill out. The doctor may refer your child to a psychologist, who specialises in helping children who have behaviour problems. Prescription medicines help many children but these drugs will not be prescribed unless a definite diagnosis is made. These medicines improve attention and concentration and decrease impulsive behaviours.

Approach in the UK

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is an independent authority in the UK responsible for developing best guidelines and approaches to prevent and treat medical conditions. NICE recommends the first steps in the treatment of ADHD should be behaviour and stress management and educational support. Parents of children with mild or moderate ADHD should be provided with training sessions to teach them how to cope with and manage their child's behaviour. NICE recommends that in mild or moderate ADHD, medication should only be prescribed if behaviour managements fail. The most effective prescription medication for ADHD is stimulant drugs such as methylphenidate (Ritalin®). NICE says that these can be considered first line treatment in severe ADHD. NICE recommends that medication should not be used in children under five years old. The stimulant drugs available can improve the ability of a child to focus but they do not work for all children. Research also suggests that these drugs are less effective after two years of use. Like all medicines, drugs used for ADHD

may have side effects and research suggests a possible effect on children's growth.

Omega-3 fish oils

Omega-3 fish oils, which have an important role to play in bodily functions, and additionally they have a beneficial effect on behavioural problems in children. Omega-3 fish oils have been investigated in ADHD and results from studies to date have suggested some improvement in reading, spelling and behaviour, with supplements containing EPA and DHA. They have an essential role to play in the growth and development of the brain and eye cells. These essential fatty acids are thought to assist children in the development of their brain function and levels of concentration, which in turn may help them to concentrate better at school. However, since many children do not consume enough oily fish or fish oils in their diet, omega-3 supplements such as Eye Q[®] capsules and Morepa Mini[®] can provide children with the correct balance of omega-3 fatty acids in a guaranteed and measured daily dose. In Whelehans, we recommend MorEPA Mini[®], which is a strawberry flavour omega 3 supplement for children from age five upwards. It can be mixed with food and drinks such as yogurt and fruit juices. MorEPA Chewable[®] is an orange taste omega 3 chewable softgel also suitable for children over five. Research has shown that students (with or without ADHD) who took MorEPA[®] fish oils were able to perform better at mental tasks.

What can you do to help your child?

Sympathetic handling by parents can improve the behaviour of most children. Children who have ADHD tend to need more structure and clearer explanations. Some guidelines which may help include; making simple house rules, setting out short and simple directions, rewarding good behaviour and setting down a schedule for doing homework etc.

Disclaimer: Please ensure you consult with your healthcare professional before making any changes recommended

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