



WHAT WE KNOW

Deciding on a Treatment for AD/HD

Sometimes people look for treatments for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) that they hope will work together with – or even instead of – their doctor’s treatments.

Doctors and others treating AD/HD use methods that have been very carefully studied, carefully tested and proven effective. These methods include medication and behavior treatment. Yet there are many other treatments for AD/HD that people hear about from friends or on the Internet.

WHAT WORDS, OR TERMS, WILL HELP ME LEARN ABOUT OTHER TREATMENTS?

Here are a two terms you need to know to understand the treatments for AD/HD discussed in this fact sheet:

1. alternative treatment. An alternative treatment is used instead of prescription medication and professional help with behavior problems.
2. complementary treatment. A complementary treatment is added to usual treatment with the hope of even better control of AD/HD symptoms.

HOW DO I DECIDE IF ALTERNATIVE OR COMPLEMENTARY TREATMENTS WILL OR WON’T HELP?

If you hear or read about an alternative or complementary treatment in a magazine or book or from another non-scientific source, be careful. Serious researchers judge each other’s work in scientific journals. Alternative and

complementary treatments usually aren't carefully tested or judged by a group of experts. They are also often controversial.

WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK ABOUT ALTERNATIVE OR COMPLEMENTARY TREATMENTS?

- Were clinical trials done to prove this treatment works? (A *clinical trial* is a scientific evaluation of a new treatment.)
- Can I find information about this treatment from a trusted source?
- Is there a respected national organization of people who practice this therapy?
- Does the person giving the treatment need a state license?
- Will my health insurance cover this treatment? (Insurance generally will not cover unproven treatments.)

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WHEN SHOULD I BE SUSPICIOUS?

- When there is a claim that the treatment will work for everyone with AD/HD (No one treatment works for everyone.)
- When the “proof” is only a few people saying that it works (It should be the result of careful research and many studies.)
- When the treatment does not have directions for using it properly or the contents are not listed on medication containers.
- When you do not get information about side effects
- When you are not told that the word *natural* is not always the same as *safe*.
- When the medicine is “a secret formula,” “astonishing,” “miraculous,” “an amazing breakthrough” or a “cure.”
- When you learn about it through infomercials or a book an author is trying to sell.
- When it comes by mail order instead of through a doctor.
- When you are told that doctors unfairly talk down the treatment or won't tell the public about it

Don't believe everything you read or hear about medical advances. Ask yourself where the information came from. Good information usually comes from medical schools, the government, medical associations and national organizations such as CHADD. Anyone can say he or she is an “expert.”

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR.

Before choosing a complementary or alternative treatment, talk to your doctor. Keep in mind that vitamins, herbs, and other treatments can cause problems with your other medications. Discuss *everything* you do to treat AD/HD with your doctor.

SOME ALTERNATIVE AND COMPLEMENTARY TREATMENTS FOR AD/HD

Dietary Treatment/ Nutritional Supplements

Having a healthy, balanced diet is key to having a happy and healthy life. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), eating properly can help lower the risk for many chronic diseases, including heart disease. Additionally, physical activity is recommended as part of a well-rounded nutritional plan.

For more information on proper nutrition, visit www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/nutrition/nutrition_for_everyone/index.htm. The DHHS report on dietary guidelines can be found at <http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines/>.

Dietary treatments *eliminate* -- or take out -- one or more foods in someone's diet (for example, sugar, candy and food with red dye). The idea is that being sensitive to certain foods can cause symptoms of AD/HD. Careful research, however, has not supported this treatment.

Nutritional supplements and large doses of vitamins *add* things that some believe are missing in a diet. Some people think diet supplements improve symptoms of AD/HD. Scientists have found no proof of this idea.

Interactive Metronome Training

A metronome is an instrument that marks exact time (it clicks) so musicians can keep their beat. An idea that people with AD/HD can get better by learning to match hand or foot tapping to the rhythm of a metronome started this treatment. Some studies found this training helpful with AD/HD movement and timing problems,

but other studies did not.

Sensory Integration Training

Integration means combining or blending. When the brain is overloaded with too many sensory messages (what is heard, seen, felt, tasted and smelled), it cannot normally react to everything. Sensory integration training is a type of therapy that tries to “teach” the brain how to better react to the different sensory messages it receives. More research must be done before this treatment can be said to help symptoms of AD/HD.

EEG Biofeedback

Doctors use EEGs (electroencephalograms) to see and record a person’s brain waves. Often “pictures” of the brains of people with AD/HD show that a certain section does not “light up” or become as active as it is in normal brains. The treatment using this information is also called neurofeedback. People with AD/HD are taught how to make these brain sections more active. After training, a patient’s behaviors -- such as lack of attention and hyperactive/impulsive behavior -- may improve. Too little research has been done to know for certain that EEG biofeedback works well. Also, parents should know that biofeedback treatments can be expensive.

The National Resource Center on AD/HD has developed a separate What We Know sheet to address this topic. Please see What We Know #6A: Complementary and Alternative Treatments: Neurofeedback (EEG Biofeedback) and AD/HD for more information.

Chiropractic

Some chiropractors believe that chiropractic medicine (therapy that adjusts the spinal column to treat illnesses) is better than medical treatments for AD/HD. No scientific studies prove that chiropractic helps with symptoms of this brain disorder.

Thyroid Treatment

Sometimes children who have thyroid disorders also have problems with attention and hyperactive behavior. Thyroid disorders in children with AD/HD are rare. However, these children should have their thyroid tested.

Vision Therapy

It is believed by some that visual problems such as faulty eye movements, sensitivity to the eyes, and focus problems, can cause reading disorders. There are different treatments for eye problems, including eye exercises and educational training. Doctors do not believe that this kind of treatment is effective.

CONCLUSION

Before deciding to use any of the treatments discussed above, talk to your doctor about whether or not they might help.

People with AD/HD have individual treatment needs. The treatment or treatments used must “fit” each individual’s needs.

Most health professionals who treat AD/HD believe *multimodal* treatment is the best treatment. Multimodal treatment includes medications, behavioral therapy, school programs and accommodations, and education of children and families about the disorder, which helps with the unwanted behavior that comes from AD/HD symptoms.

CHADD supports more research on all treatments for AD/HD.

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The full version of this sheet, “Complimentary and Alternative Treatments,” is also available online at www.help4adhd.org

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