Alternative Treatments for ADHD That May Help

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Controlling Symptoms of ADHD Naturally

For those of us with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), managing symptoms can seem like an impossible balancing act. Maybe by standing on one leg, cocking our head to one side, and holding our jaw just right, we might find a bit of relief.

Treatment plans can be almost as confusing as the swirl of chaos inside our brain. Do we choose medication? Do we choose alternative therapies? Both? Which is best?

We have options. There is no one-size-fits-all treatment. We are free to try anything that may help, as far as our comfort levels allow.

ADHD treatments work best when we look at the big picture. When we see our body and mind working together to achieve health, we can attain a life where we are in control of our symptoms instead of one where our symptoms control us.

There are many things you can do to find some relief when using alternative treatments for ADHD.

Manage Symptoms With Nutrition

When you do a quick Google search for “ADHD diet,” an abundance of links come up – and some of the websites are reputable. However, some are not.

You have to wade through the websites to get to the “good stuff.” For example, a lot of the sites will list specific “good” and “bad” foods for ADHD, without a lot of reason why the foods are good and bad. There’s also a lot of anecdotal “evidence.”

The Research Behind ADHD and Nutrition

According to *Harvard Health*, much research still needs to be done find a real correlation between nutrition and ADHD. There have been some studies, but they have been small. However, they have been promising.

- A relatively recent study in Britain followed 153 preschoolers and 144 elementary students – some of who had ADHD, and some of who did not. At controlled intervals, the researchers gave the students and preschoolers foods and beverages with artificial food coloring. Although the increase in hyperactivity was not significant, it was notable.
- The American Psychiatric Association conducted several studies regarding the use of omega-3 fatty acids to control ADHD symptoms. The use of DHA was ineffective, although the use of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids seemed to be beneficial.
- Further studies have noted that people with ADHD may be deficient in certain micronutrients – namely,

vitamin B6, magnesium, zinc, and iron. However, the studies that have tested if supplementation reduces symptoms of ADHD have been inconsistent.

So, I can't tell you what to eat and what to avoid, but looking at the studies that have been done, you can certainly trial cutting out foods that contain food coloring and upping your intake of foods containing omega-3 fatty acids.

I would, however, not recommend supplementing with micronutrients without discussing this with your (or your child's) physician first.

Which is what expert Richard Sogn, MD, suggests. Per WebMD, Dr. Sogn states "whatever is good for the brain is likely to be good for ADHD."

- High protein foods such as beans, eggs, meat, and nuts are beneficial – and as a bonus, can improve concentration and may make ADHD medications last longer!
- Cut down on simple carbs – for example, foods containing sugar, white flour, and corn syrup.
- Increase complex carbs – for example, fruits and vegetables.
- Increase omega-3 fatty acids – fish such as tuna and salmon, and walnuts and Brazil nuts.
- Utilize an elimination diet to see if a particular food worsens ADHD symptoms – Select a certain food then cut it out completely. Then add it back to see if this food is causing symptoms.

Using Nature as a Therapy

When we were kids how often did we hear someone tell us to go outside and burn off some energy? Just like when we were younger, exercise is still a good way to burn off that excess energy and help us to focus.

More than exercise, time spent outdoors in natural settings can effectively reduce inattentiveness. The greener space, the better. Nature grounds us in ways we might not fully understand, but it works.

Next page: Alternative treatments for ADHD including yoga, acupuncture, mindful meditation, and essential oils and herbs.

Using Yoga to Calm the Body and Mind

It is known that yoga is a mind-body exercise that is more than just *exercise* – and this mind-body connection has been studied. We are aware that it can improve the symptoms associated with anxiety, depression, chronic back pain, migraines, and ADHD.

In 2016, *Harvard Health* reported that in 2012, 3 percent of the nation's children were doing yoga regularly. While that may not seem like a large number, that was 400,000 more children practicing yoga than the year 2007.

The uptick in yoga practice has prompted an increase in research on yoga in children, and it has found that "yoga can improve focus, memory, self-esteem, academic performance, and classroom behavior, and can even reduce anxiety and stress in children. Emerging research studies also suggest that yoga can help children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) by improving the core symptoms of ADHD, including inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. It can also boost school performance in children with ADHD."

In yet another research study conducted in India in 2012, 69 school-age children attended a once or twice weekly yoga class. After one year, the parents and teachers of the students completed questionnaires – 46 percent of the teachers reported that the children had significant improvement in behavior, and 92 percent of the parents reported a significant improvement in behavior.

I could go on and on about the research regarding yoga and ADHD but suffice it to say – a regular yoga practice works to reduce ADHD symptoms.

Acupuncture and Acupressure

Acupuncture restores energy flow. While I have not tried it myself, many people with ADHD feel they benefit from acupuncture. It is said to improve focus and calm the mind and body.

The purpose of acupressure is to bring back balance in energy systems of the body and treat illnesses, calm emotions, and rejuvenate the spirit. Who couldn't use a little rejuvenation of the mind?

I have recently begun to use some simple acupressure routines in the morning and at times during the day when I start to feel overwhelmed or stressed. I'm not sure yet about the full benefit, but I do know that taking a few moments to calm my breathing and get back in the moment certainly helps.

Mindfulness Meditation to Reduce Symptoms

"Mindfulness" is quite the buzzword these days. Meditation for ADHD may be hard for those who find it difficult to stay in one place. However, according to researchers, mindfulness-based training is an effective intervention for treating ADHD.

Although there are several definitions of mindfulness, one research study cites mindfulness as, "a trait or set of skills such as being nonreactive, observing with awareness, acting with awareness, describing with awareness, and adopting a nonjudgmental approach towards one's experience."

Mindfulness training, through the use of meditation, helps to gain mindfulness, which subsequently reduces ADHD symptoms.

Research is promising regarding using mindfulness meditation training to treat ADHD in all age groups, but is probably not recommended as a standalone treatment and should be utilized along with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and other treatment options as indicated. Further research needs to be conducted in larger trials.

Essential Oils and Herbal Supplements

You can purchase several different brands of essential oils and herbal supplements to ease ADHD symptoms. I've tried a couple of the herbal supplements but didn't find any that were especially helpful for myself. Others have told me they have had fantastic results with them.

There are also different essential oils that can be used to ease symptoms. I have seen several online that were mixtures of oils such as vandiver, frankincense, patchouli, and ylang ylang, all of which are useful for calming the mind, soothing the nervous system and supporting the immune system.

I have tried a couple of the oils that I believe do help.

Using a bit of the oil at the temples or back of neck you catch the scent of it throughout the day. I don't particularly like the smell though, so for me, it's kind of a toss-up over how much it helps versus if I can stand to smell it all day.

There are many choices regarding your personal alternative treatments for ADHD plan. Different things work for different people. Listen to your body and do what is best for you.

I have found that proper nutrition, exercise, and meditation are the best things I can do to keep my symptoms at a manageable level. These alternative treatments for ADHD are relatively easy and always within my grasp.

It might take a little planning, but anything you do to take care of your body and mind is never wasted.

Resources

Harvard Health (Diet and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

Harvard Health (More Than Just a Game: Yoga for School-Age Children)

Huffington Post (Kids Yoga May Help Relieve ADHD)

U.S. National Library of Medicine (Mindfulness Mediation Training for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Adulthood: Current Empirical Support, Treatment Overview, and Future Directions)

WebMD (ADHD Diets)