

ADHD: Is Naturopathic Medicine a realistic treatment option?

By Dr. Scott Clack, Naturopathic Doctor

Yes - with some qualifications.

ADHD (Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) is a complex condition that affects learning either through inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsive behaviour. It is a learning disorder on its own, or part of other conditions such as tics/Tourette's Syndrome, OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) or Autism Spectrum Disorders. Five to twelve per cent of children are currently diagnosed with ADHD¹.

The conventional approach to treating ADHD includes:

1. Cognitive behavioural therapy or psychological interventions
2. Special education and supports in the school environment
3. Medications: Methylphenidate (Ritalin, Concerta), Adderall

Medication is the dominant treatment. Side-effects of the medications can be a concern for some families; the side-effects include: **appetite reduction or suppression** (could be related to nausea or stomach irritation); **sleep disturbance**; **growth delay**; **rebound** (restart of ADHD symptoms/behaviours when the medication is stopped or wears off); and **irritability or mood lability**².

Naturopathic Medicine considers ADHD to be a multi-factorial condition³, where the child presents with a series of symptoms or behaviours that result from various overlapping triggers such as:

- a. Nutritional deficiencies - commonly omega-3 fatty acids, Vitamins B6 and B12, iron, magnesium and zinc but others have been reported
- b. Food sensitivities or reactions - many foods can interfere with neurotransmitter function (Dopamine, Serotonin) or appear to overstimulate brain activity (eg. sugar, food colours)
- c. Heavy metal pollutants and toxic chemicals (eg. pesticides, cleaning products)
- d. Thyroid dysfunction
- e. Subacute infections: bacterial, viral, yeast and/or parasites
- f. Parenting styles

The article by Dr. Parris Kidd (2000, Alternative Medicine Review) is a thorough and technical overview of treating ADHD with Complementary and Alternative Medicine treatments. I recommend parents read this article because of the balance it gives between conventional and Naturopathic approaches.

At first the conventional approach seems far easier: take one pill a day, and arrange for accommodations to be made at school. The parents and children that I work with are aware of the medication side-effects and would like to avoid them, or don't want their child to take medication on-going, over many years. In other cases, parents may be more interested in natural therapies and medicines and wish to follow a natural-therapy based plan in the beginning. The option certainly exists to integrate or combine naturopathic with conventional treatments.

The two key challenges faced in a naturopathic approach are dietary change, and managing the use of many supplements. Children are usually "addicted" to the foods that they eat,

largely a function of taste (often coming from sugars, carbs or fats) and societal influence (what are their friends eating? advertising on TV or the internet). Evidence shows that eating habits of children can be influenced by parental modelling⁴. The 2014 study in the journal, *Appetite*, found that children would cooperate better with dietary changes if the parents modeled or followed the same eating habits they expected their children to follow, and that parental “control” of the child’s eating (“eat what I tell you to eat”) was least effective. At Touchstone we talk to families about making dietary changes that will benefit the entire family, supporting the child with ADHD in a positive manner. We also emphasize that the dietary changes are not permanent, and that “treats” can be enjoyed as the treatment period proceeds.

Many supplements are necessary for a child with ADHD. Younger children, even teens, have difficulty swallowing capsules. This problem is extended when there could be 6-10 different supplements identified in tests that could be deficient and contributing to their Dopamine and Serotonin imbalances. Experience has shown that these combinations of supplements don’t taste very good if they are taken out of the capsule(s) for a child to be able to take them. The final blow can be with children who refuse their supplements because nobody else in their family or circle of friends is taking a handful of medicine every day, unfortunately emphasizing that they are different.

Our experience at Touchstone has enabled us to find creative solutions:

- a. Teach children how to swallow capsules
- b. Arranging customized formulas from a pharmacy, reducing the number of bottles and pills
- c. Mixing supplements in “smoothies” that the child can help prepare. Since many adults are taking smoothies for various health reasons, the child will now be modeling their parent(s).
- d. Choosing medicines that are in liquid form, especially herbal or homeopathic medicines

The goal is finding the approach that best suits your child: a customized treatment plan that they can be compliant with, and that should be easy for the parent to manage.

If you have a child with ADHD or other type of learning disability (or developmental disorder) and you’re looking for an integrated treatment approach (or a complete Naturopathic approach), we can help - call us today at 905-822-2046.

Please review the following examples of children who were successfully treated at Touchstone Naturopathic Centre.

Case Study 1:

7 year old female, cc: ADHD

- Impulsivity, hyper kinesis
- Pica
- Allergic shiners
- Insomnia - initiation type
- Sinusitis

- Cavities
- Dyspepsia, eructation, gastralgia (intermittent)
- Anxiety
- Mood changes - from happy to crying

Patient history included:

- Easily distracted - teacher has to re-direct; can't finish work in class
- Runny nose stopped after food eliminations
- Increased hyperactivity w/ candy, pizza
- At 4 years old she had thrush and vaginitis, and was prescribed antifungals
- Head injury had occurred
- Frequent ear infections
- Already eats organic foods at home, no additives
- Migraines: aura, vomiting, nausea
- Hard to wake in mornings, gym is exhausting
- Weakness, poor coordination (gross & fine)
- Walks around in class, plays w/ her pencil
- 13 cavities, 1 root canal
- Acts silly, dances, talks (loquacious) - possible signs of Candidiasis, as is spontaneous laughing (howling)
- Plays often by herself

Successful Naturopathic Treatments included:

- Elimination Diet
- Iron (Spa Tone)
- Zinc picolinate
- M5+ (enzymes)
- L. Sporogenes, other probiotics
- DMAE, Vinpocetine, Bacopa, Pycnogenol
- Krill oil
- Phosphatidyl serine
- Lipoceutical GSH
- B Complex w/ P5P, Calcium/Magnesium
- Allergy desensitization (NAET)

Naturopathic treatments initially improved her energy and reduced her chronic infections. ADHD improvement was finally achieved after chelation (heavy metal detoxification) with DMSA and Lipoic Acid.

Case Study #2

6 year old female: Difficult concentration at school (not formally assessed w/ ADHD)

- Can't focus on things to be done in class
- Easily distracted at school or home; doesn't complete most tasks because she forgets parts
- Restless, fidgety
- Impulsive - relatively risky actions, behaviours, little patience
- Secondary complaints of: bedwetting; intermittent stomach pains; recurring canker sores

Treatment included:

1. Dietary changes based on food sensitivity testing; parents were also reducing the use of processed foods to reduce consumption of food additives, colours and salicylates
2. Vitamin B6 and magnesium
3. Omega 3 supplement
4. Probiotic supplement which enhances digestion and assimilation of nutrients from foods and supplements, plus improves immune system activity
5. Children's multivitamin
6. Herbal tincture containing Lemon balm, Bacopa and Rhodiola (calming, increasing focus and task completion)
7. Homeopathic remedy (2 single/constitutional remedies were recommended and used)

Within 6-7 months the attention and minor behaviour issues were well controlled. The homeopathic remedies were significant in these results.

We're ready to help - call today at 905-822-2046

References:

1. CADDRA (Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance) website, What is ADHD (page 2) <http://www.caddra.ca/public-information/parents?showall=&start=1>
2. <http://childmind.org/article/side-effects-of-adhd-medication/>
3. *Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Children: Rationale for Its Integrative Management* by Parris Kidd, PhD, *Alt Med Rev* 2000; 5(5): 402-428.
4. The role of parental control and modelling in predicting a child's diet and relationship with food after they leave home: A prospective study. *Appetite*. 2014 Jan 27; 76C:23-29

Additional Resources:

5. *Healing the Childhood Epidemics: Autism, ADHD, Asthma and Allergies: The Groundbreaking Program for the 4-A Disorders*. Kenneth Bock, MD
6. Biomarker-Guided Interventions of Clinically Relevant Conditions Associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. *Alternative Medicine Review* 2010; 15(1): 15-32.
7. Diagnosis Autism: Now What? A Simplified Biomedical Approach by Dan Rossignol, MD
Autism Files 2009