

## ***Treating ADD/ADHD-type behavior the natural way***

Staci J. Ellis RN BSN HNC

(800) 384-0574

[www.pacific-coastwellness.com](http://www.pacific-coastwellness.com)

**According to the DSM-IV criteria, an individual must show at least 6 out of 9 symptoms of inattention or at least 6 of 9 behaviors indicating hyperactivity or impulsivity to be diagnosed with ADD/ADHD.** The following are examples of symptoms of ADD-type behavior:

- symptoms must have begun before age seven.
- the child or adult must demonstrate the behaviors in school and at home.
- often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in school work or other activities.
- often has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities.
- often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.
- often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities.
- often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort such as schoolwork or homework.
- often loses things necessary for tasks or activities.
- is often easily distracted by extraneous stimuli.
- often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat.
- often has difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly.
- is often “on the go” or often acts as if “driven by a motor”.
- often has difficulty awaiting turn.
- often interrupts or intrudes on others by butting into conversations or games. (1)

Have you ever wondered if there is a more natural way to be with your child? This essay was inspired by my school-aged son, Marc, who has been exhibiting ADD-type behavior since he was four years old. I have simply used my holistic nursing skills to dig up the research, while using him and other children as subjects in the spirit of my own experimentation. The following essay explains how ADD-type behavior can be treated naturally, in lieu of or as an adjunct to conventional stimulant pharmaceutical drug therapy.

It is estimated that between 3-5% of all school age children are afflicted with ADHD (2). Because so many people are affected by this “disorder”, an entire industry has developed around it. The problem is worsened by the fact that there are too many special interest groups financially benefiting from the expansion of this “problem”. ADD/ADHD are being used as labels to explain behaviors that may be affected by factors that range from nutritional deficiencies, allergies and environmental toxins to ineffective parenting techniques, just to name a few. In order to effectively deal with the ADD problem, professionals and parents must look at the various underlying causes of behavior and not so quick to label the children as ADHD and to prescribe medication to control it.

**In order to achieve vibrant brain health, we must study brain nutrition, because it is in our diets that we will find many of the answers for which we've been looking.**

The diet must supply the blocks to build and maintain the brain. The diet is one major change in our culture over the past century that has altered the physical state of our brains. We must feed our brains properly if we want them to be healthy. (3) The first order of business when cleaning up a child's nutritional status is to find a way to deliver whole food supplementation while introducing higher quality foods into his diet and removing the toxic junk from his world. The best whole food supplementation on the market today is Juice Plus, the juice of 17 fruits, vegetables and grains in a capsule. Marc consumes all forms of Juice Plus including Vineyard blend (excluding cats and dogs), which works out to be double the recommended dose for his age. That's O.K. because it is whole food, and his body processes the concentrated nutrients as it does food. All of my children and most of my young clients know Dr. William Sears' book *Eat Healthy, Feel Great* from cover to cover. It is mandatory that children understand theory behind nutrition. This knowledge empowers them to take responsibility for themselves and to make better food choices now and later in life.

**Certain chains of essential fatty acids must be present in our bodies in a healthy ratio.** If not balanced properly, attention, focus, memory and learning ability can be impaired. (4) Two of these essential fatty acids are Omega-3 and Omega-6 and both must be obtained from food. Omega-6 fats are found in highest concentrations in land animals. Omega-3 fats are found in fatty fish like tuna and salmon, walnuts, soybeans, flaxseeds and avocados. Humans have historically consumed a diet that supported an Omega-6 to Omega-3 ratio of 1:1 to 4:1, but the American diet has evolved to a ratio of 25:1. I always recommend to my clients that they consume fresh ground flax seeds in their Complete shakes each day, but I could not find a way to consistently deliver them into my son's diet. Marc is now taking daily Omega-3 fish oil supplementation.

**Serotonin is a critical neurotransmitter associated with lowering hyperactivity, controlling aggression, muting the response to sensory input, enhancing sleep, and improving mood and cognitive performance** (5). Current research is suggesting a correlation between depression, aggressive, impulsive and compulsive behavior and lower levels of serotonin in the brain. A natural alternative to Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors today (Prozac/Paxil) is 5-HTP, or Hydroxytryptophan. Tryptophan is a natural precursor to serotonin in the production chain of neurotransmitters. It stimulates the body to produce its own serotonin without any of the side effects that one may experience with traditional SSRI's. Marc is taking daily 5-HTP supplementation. This made a remarkable difference within two weeks. A word of caution: 5-HTP has NOT been tested on children.

**Now the real fun begins, removing the junk from his diet.** Although this task is most important as a fundamental starting point for your child's progress, it is by far the most difficult one for parents to get a handle on. It requires a considerable amount of time, patience, brain power and education of the parents to accomplish measurable results in their children. Parents, for the most part, are simply unaware of the effects that sugar, sugar substitutes, food dyes, preservatives, and trans fats have on a child's behavior and

overall health status. The most important ingredients to eliminate from the diet when addressing ADD type behavior are sugar, sugar substitutes, food dyes and hydrogenated/partially hydrogenated (trans) fats. One gram of sugar equals 4 teaspoons. Aspartame, preservatives and food dyes are all neurotoxins and immune crashers. Trans fats cannot be digested by the body, radically increasing the Omega-6 to Omega-3 ratio of essential fatty acids. The only way to educate parents is to increase awareness about how these ingredients are destroying brains, heart health and immune function. *Label Reading 101* is where I begin with parents. I believe that all parents should enroll in this course before having children, perhaps making it part of child birthing classes. Although I have been a holistic nurse for over 10 years, I still struggle with the evolutionary process of changing my family's diet because I am fighting the food industry advertisers who are targeting my children to buy their poisons each and every day. We must become more aware as consumers if we expect to raise healthier children with healthier brains.

**We cannot forget about parenting techniques when dealing with ADD type behavior in our children.** I see negative, cyclical patterns here: Ineffective parenting techniques can worsen ADD type behavior, a child's volatile behavior can cause inconsistent parenting, and the cycle repeats itself forever until everyone is exhausted. Positive Parenting techniques, when taught properly, can help parents incorporate creative discipline techniques and natural consequences into a child's life without the use of shame and blame as a catalyst for better behavior. It is also strongly recommended that parents join forces, get on the same page, and strengthen the bond with each other first. Children are sensitive to apathy and conflict in the home. Find a good psychotherapist who teaches positive parenting techniques in a private environment or in a workshop setting. It may benefit your family more than you know.

**Yoga and meditation help to calm the brain and integrate the mind, body and spirit together.** I have been teaching mind clearing meditation for years and I admit that when addressing mind clearing, the only difference between a child and an adult is that a child can be expected to stay focused in a meditative state for only several minutes at one time. The key is to teach deep breathing and allow the child to remove his thoughts from his mind so that he begins to visualize a blank chalk board, empty space or a blue sky. Practicing this each day can give a child valuable life skills that most adults never learn in a lifetime. Yoga helps to develop his sense of physical play, improve learning skills and nourish his creativity. Combine meditation each day with a children's tape on Yoga and you may have a future little wellness guru on your hands.

**Finally, I encourage all parents who are dealing with ADD type behavior to choose at least one holistic modality of treatment and stay with it.** Examples of complimentary modalities include chiropractic care, homeopathy, acupuncture, naturopathy and body works. Marc and I have chosen traditional Japanese acupuncture as his modality of choice because it is gentle, painless, and totally comprehensive. Traditional Chinese acupuncturists tend to use fatter needles that penetrate deeper into the tissue, causing pain at times. Eastern practitioners have been using acupuncture and herbs for over 5,000 years. Modern western medicine, as we know it today, has been in practice for less than 100 years. You can do the math and draw your own conclusions. I

believe that eastern medicine is one of the most effective healthcare delivery systems that we have on this planet today and is becoming more accessible to Americans. It is designed as a maintenance system, keeping us healthy, balanced and strong. Marc is being treated for liver chi excess spilling over into spleen deficiency. His practitioner is treating his digestion, which has a calming effect on his spirit. As you can see, eastern medicine is completely different than what we are used to. Don't let this intimidate you. It all makes sense to the practitioner and to those who may be inspired to pick up a book and learn about it.

Other suggestions that I can make are to **encourage gross motor movement whenever possible**. Get a trampoline, enroll him in high energy sports, or get out for regular walks and bike rides with the family. **Turn off the T.V. and the video games.**

This essay was written to help parents understand that a child's ADD/ADHD symptoms may be exacerbated by an organic biochemical imbalance and/or a combination of different factors affecting his brain and his behavior. Since we have implemented new style into Marc's life, he has consistently performed at a higher academic level and the issue of discipline in the classroom and at home has virtually disappeared. Marc is fortunate that we have his teacher's unwavering encouragement and support. Put on your investigative hat and roll up your sleeves to determine how you can make a difference in the quality of your child's life. Add new style to his life and be patient. Rome was not built in a day and neither will your child's results. Permanent changes take time to unfold and nurture. Examine your current situation and ask yourself if your child is worth the extra effort on your part. I believe that born in the heart of every child is the power to change the world, but his body and brain have to be healthy if he is going to reach his profound God-given potential.

#### Suggested Reading:

1. *The Crazy Makers: How the Food Industry Is Destroying Our Brains and Harming Our Children* by Carol Simontacchi, 2000
2. *Positive Discipline For Working Parents* by Jane Nelsen and Lisa Larson, 2003
3. *Positive Discipline for Teenagers* by Jane Nelson and Lynn Lott
4. *Diagnosis And Alternative Therapies For ADHD* by Dr. Pamela Popper, 2001
5. *The Indigo Children* by Lee Carroll and Jan Tober, 1999
6. *Eat Health, Feel Great* by William Sears, M.D. and Martha Sears, R.N. and Christie Watts Kelly, 2002.
7. *Yoga Fitness For Ages 3-6* by Gaiam, Inc. Video

#### Bibliography

1. Daniel Goleman, "How Viewers Grow Addicted To Television" New York Times, 1991.
2. Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D., *The Myth of the ADD Child* (Plume, 1997).
3. Carol Simontacchi, *Crazy Makers: How the food industry is destroying our brains and harming our children* (Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000) page 35.
4. Pamela A. Popper, Ph.D., N.D., *Diagnosis and Alternative Therapies For ADHD* (Copyright PB Industries, Inc. 2001) page 17.
5. Carol Simontacchi, *Crazy Makers* (Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000) page 68.

