

ADD/ADHD and Allergies

By Heidi Hawkins, MAc, LAc

Children (and adults) with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) pose a variety of challenges for any practitioner who wishes to treat them.

People with ADD/ADHD invariably have allergies, the most common and problematic of which tend to be chemical.

Food chemicals such as artificial flavors; artificial colors; artificial sweeteners; and preservatives are often the biggest offenders. In addition, processed food and pesticides are likely to pose problems for such sensitive people. Processed sugar tops the list.

Other common problematic chemical allergies include most laundry detergents, fabric softeners and laundry chemicals. Cleaning chemicals typically used in the home, school, office, and other public buildings are also usually allergenic.

Lifestyle recommendations for people with ADD/ADHD can help minimize reactions. Obvious choices would be:

- Using safe laundry soaps and household cleaners, such as those in health food stores.
- Eating organic, natural foods.
- Avoiding junk food religiously.
- Avoiding unnecessary chemicals, especially in the home.

In addition, foods that are particularly hot, stagnating or phlegm-producing should be avoided. This includes dairy products; wheat; hot, spicy food; peanuts; most commercial fruit juices; and especially processed starchy foods such as bread and pasta.

Avoiding such toxins and unhealthy lifestyle choices would benefit all of us. However, with highly sensitive people, it is essential. To me, this is the bottom line with people with ADD/ADHD -- they are highly sensitive. Reducing toxic stress and unhealthy eating practices will benefit them, but will not change who and what they are. Our Western world of overstimulation and constant entertainment/marketing ploys is unhealthy for us all, but we are not all the same. Some of us are more affected by what is wrong in our world than others, and that is consistently true of people with ADD/ADHD.

It is typical of people with allergies to seek, crave and become addicted to what they are allergic to. This includes the overstimulation of television; action movies; computer games; bright fluorescent lights; stimulating drugs; and junk food. The world is so overwhelming that people may seek to numb themselves in a variety of ways. That which is wrong is so very wrong that people may blame themselves or assume they need medication; are ill; or are somehow defective if this sick world makes them sick.

Who is really sick? Television marketing, with rapid flashing imagery that numbs the mind, or the person whose mind is overwhelmed and sickened into seeking ever more intense stimulation? Where is the solution to our toxic culture and the sickness it creates?

Ritalin works on the energy system of a person in the same way: it is a stimulant. It strengthens what is already in excess, and creates stagnation and heat in the body. It adds to the problem, but makes it so severe that the person with ADD/ADHD must shut down or self-destruct. The more sensitive a person is, the more challenging it is to live in this world. For those who understand traditional Chinese medicine, here is the information according to the principles:

- Ritalin - hot and stagnating
- Food chemicals - hot and stagnating
- Pesticides and cleaners in schools, etc. -- also hot and stagnating, though some chemicals are cold and stagnating
- Laundry detergent, fabric softeners - warm and toxic, except bleach, which is cold and extremely toxic

To put it bluntly, people with ADD/ADHD are less tolerant of garbage. They are canaries in the cultural coalmine in the way that the chemically sensitive are canaries in the chemical coalmine. People with allergies are trying to wake us up to what needs to change in our world. Perhaps people with allergies are more evolved?

Not all people diagnosed with ADD/ADHD follow the pattern laid out in this article, because such a catch-all diagnosis tends to be overused. Some people are diagnosed with ADD/ADHD because of drug problems or history (recreational or medicinal) or brain injury from a parent's drug/alcohol abuse history. The two syndromes are not mutually exclusive, however, and it is becoming increasingly common to find them together.

The solutions are certainly challenging. Every person can be cured of allergies, but will that make our world a safe and healthy place to live? People with ADD/ADHD generally need far less stimulation than they are getting. They need discipline of the spiritual and cultural type, not the heavy-handed "because I said so!" kind of discipline many of us grew up with. They need the kind of discipline that lets them know they have a place in the world, a purpose and a sense of belonging, and they are expected to contribute. Many find that most adults cannot provide or sustain these things for their children or community, and are baffled and bewildered by the downward spiral of people who seek things that are self-destructive for such a sensitive individual.

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