

Your Child and ADD

Q.What are the main symptoms of attention deficit disorder? My child is 8 years old, and my husband and I suspect that he has ADD.
—K.H., Oakland, Calif.

A.There are several symptoms that are common to children with attention deficit disorder (ADD). And although these characteristics are found to a lesser degree in many children, they are more pronounced in children with ADD.

First, ADD children are very easily and quickly distracted, a factor that is considered one of the main symptoms of the disorder. They may be distracted when someone coughs, sneezes, drops an object, moves a chair or sharpens a pencil, and the ensuing interruption of their concentration can affect their ability to complete assignments, homework or tests.

Children with ADD also are daydreamers. While other children are listening to the teacher, they may be engrossed in their imagination.

They also are impulsive. They act before they think. An ADD child usually has many different thoughts in his mind at one time and may act impulsively on any one of them.

Selective attention is another symptom. Whenever anything

becomes boring, the child will quickly lose attention and turn to whatever interests him.

A well-structured social environment is very beneficial for children with ADD. It is important for your child to have set times for breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as for doing his homework and going to bed. But don't be too rigid with this, and set adequate time for him to play and have study breaks—to keep him from becoming bored and to minimize daydreaming.

Most children with ADD are hands-on learners—they are known as “kinesthetic” learners, not auditory or visual learners. But most school systems use auditory or visual teaching methods.

To help offset this difference, children with ADD may need to move around while learning, or touch objects as they learn about them. Many ADD children are quite good at video games, certain sports, and any other activities that involve watching and practicing with hands-on learning.

Drama and role-playing are very helpful in holding their attention. Do what you're able to do to make the learning experience exciting, fun and entertaining.

Unfortunately, there is no single, conclusive test for ADD. It requires a clinical diagnosis that usually is based on either a psychologist's or medical doctor's judgment.

Q.What treatments besides

Ritalin are available for children who suffer from ADD?

–J.G., Colorado Springs, Colo.

A. The first thing I recommend is to eliminate junk food from the diet of a child with ADD and implement a whole-foods diet. Symptoms of ADD improve dramatically in many children if they are taken off sodas, candy, cake, cookies and chips and are fed fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds and lean meats.

It is very important that children with ADD take in complex carbohydrates instead of simple sugars. The brain requires a steady supply of sugar and uses 20 percent of the body's carbohydrate supply. Highly processed foods with simple sugars cause wide fluctuations in blood-sugar levels—both too high and too low—and will affect a child's mood swings and ability to concentrate.

Foods such as whole-grain breads; fruits; and high-fiber, low-sugar cereals help keep the blood sugar stable. A well-balanced snack—such as a nutritionally balanced bar from a health-food store—fed at mid-morning and mid-afternoon is advisable for any child with ADD.

It might prove helpful to make your child a “brain smoothie” to boost energy and concentration. A simple smoothie includes 8 ounces of skim or soy milk, 1 tablespoon of granular lecithin, 1 tablespoon of flaxseed oil, 1 tablespoon of soy protein, 1 frozen banana or 1/2 to 1 cup of frozen strawberries, 1 packet of the natural sweetener Stevia. Blend all ingredients and include crushed ice if you'd like.