

Treating ADHD

Commonsense solutions

Nancy Buono, BFRP

Have you or someone you know been diagnosed with ADHD? You are not alone. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder labels a substantial number of children and adults who suffer from inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsivity.

What is the solution? Prescription drugs do offer treatment for ADHD, and their use is on the increase across North America. Between 1999 and 2004, Health Canada reported a 43-percent increase in the use of ADHD medication for children.

Other countries, however, have taken a more prudent approach to medication. In England, the British Psychological Society urges caution in using medications, stating: "It must not be the first, and definitely not the only, line of treatment." Fortunately, effective treatment options do exist.

Turn off the TV

Get away from the screen. The journal *Pediatrics* reports the more time a young child spends in front of the TV, the greater the chance they will develop attention problems by age seven. TV and video games alter brain waves, creating a lack of focus and concentration. Set TV viewing limits for all family members.

Go outside

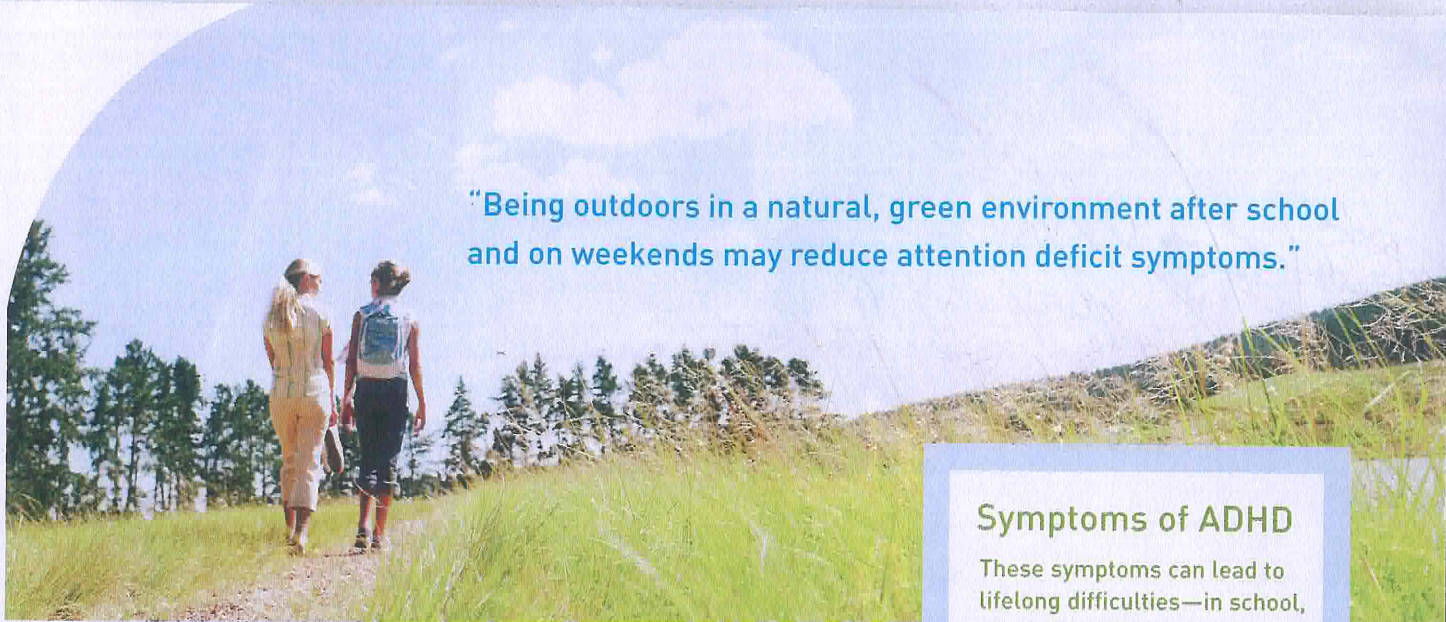
Enjoy some fresh air. Being outdoors in a natural, green environment after school and on weekends may reduce

attention deficit symptoms, according to a 2004 study of over 2,000 children of all ages. While the TV is off, take the opportunity to frolic in the grass, throw a ball, run with the dog, or go for a walk or bike ride.

Be happy

Take care of your emotional needs. Seek out a counsellor who can help you manage the challenges associated with ADHD behaviour. Consider using homeopathy and flower remedies to manage emotions. Researchers have found Bach flower remedies may





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be effective in managing ADHD symptoms.

Get enough sleep

Create a regulated sleep schedule. Studies show adequate sleep improves our cognitive abilities. We all get cranky and irritable when we are tired, no matter how old. Overtired kids demonstrate a unique form of frenetic energy known only too well to their parents.

How dangerous are ADHD drugs?

The US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) website states “Ritalin is ...structurally and pharmacologically similar to amphetamines and cocaine and has the same dependency profile of cocaine and other stimulants.” Even the milder side effects of ADHD drugs include such problems as behaviour disturbances, psychotic episodes, anxiety, restlessness, agitation, amnesia, confusion, lack of emotion, and hostility.

Take nutritional supplements

Support your health with the proper nutrients. When researchers compared a group of children treated with Ritalin to another group that received a mixture of supplements, they found identical improvement in the behaviours of both groups. These key nutrients included vitamins B, C, E, minerals (magnesium, calcium, and zinc), phytonutrients, amino acids, essential fatty acids, antioxidants, phospholipids (needed for brain development), and acidophilus (for healthy intestinal bacteria). Essential fatty acids are just that—essential for the brain—and omega-3s need support from vitamins and minerals to convert properly in the body.

Eat genuine whole foods

Use natural sweeteners available at your health food store such as honey, organic raw sugar, molasses, or stevia. Natural sugar cane loses 99 percent of its magnesium when it is refined to white sugar, while refined white flour contains 80 to 96 percent less magnesium content than its whole grain counterpart.

Current research supports diets similar to the Feingold diet, which became popular in the 1970s and is still used today by parents concerned about their children’s food allergies.

Symptoms of ADHD

These symptoms can lead to lifelong difficulties—in school, at work, and in personal relationships:

- poor attention to detail
- fidgeting
- difficulty sustaining attention and following instructions
- poor listening skills and organization
- impatience and tendency to be easily distracted

Eat fewer additives and preservatives and eliminate common allergenic foods. Since ADHD is related to brain activity, it only makes sense to support the brain with protein as well as foods high in essential fatty acids such as fish.

It’s reassuring to know that natural commonsense solutions still serve us well and are backed by research. A combination of dietary, lifestyle, and behavioural interventions offers relief from many ADHD symptoms. So, as our parents instructed us when we were kids: get plenty of sleep, take your vitamins, turn off the TV, and go play outside!

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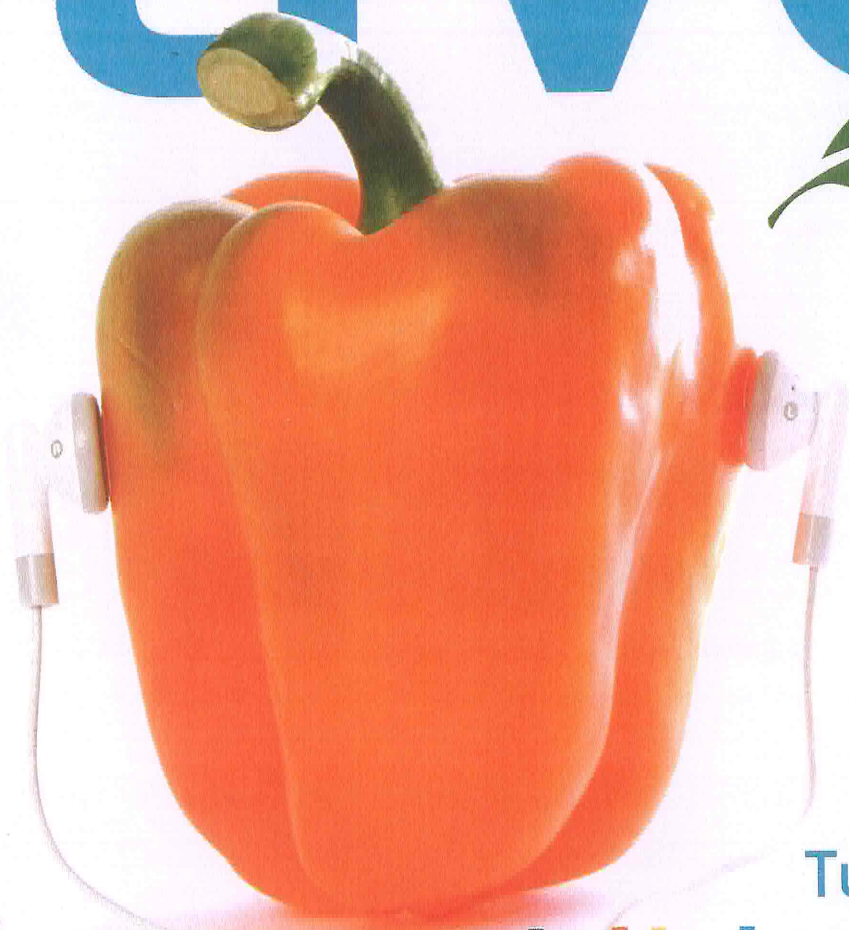
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Best baby foods
How to treat ADHD