

Helping Kids Stay Fit and Stay Focused – Mitigating ADHD

By Elizabeth Taddiken, N. D.

Statistics from a long-term European Youth Heart Study concluded that children who are physically unfit at the age of 9 years old have double the risk of developing attention problems (ADHD) during their teenage years compared with physically fit children. There are many different factors that contribute to ADHD, including genetics and exposures to environmental toxins, like cigarette smoke. There are also many different options when it comes to treatments. But in my opinion, if there are completely free and completely risk-free things we can do to reduce young children's risk of ever developing ADHD in the first place, then we should do them!

Now we know that keeping kids active and physically fit is one of those things. Here are some fun ideas to keep our kids moving and their bodies strong:

- Kick around a soccer ball
- Play frisbee
- Jump on a pogo stick
- Roller skate
- Ride scooters or bikes
- Jump rope
- Race down the block
- Play hopscotch
- Play 4 Square
- Have a dance party
- Go for a hike

Can you think of more?

5 Ways to Reduce the Risk of ADHD

If we are going to help our kids reduce the risk of ADHD, there are some foundational tools we can focus on.

Remove sugar!

Yes, that is top of the list, and many of you probably know why. Sugar sets the brain off into a tailspin for many with ADHD. Have you ever heard the phrase "The other

white powder”? That is a comparison of sugar to cocaine. Sugar can hit the same buttons, and have the same addictive quality. When someone has a tendency towards ADHD, sugar acts like a drug in many ways. Cut it out of the diet and replace with non-glycemic natural sweeteners like Stevia, Monkfruit, or slightly higher on the glycemic chart would be honey and maple syrup. Choose foods that are more complex, and provide adequate supplemental nutrition to a poor diet when you have picky kids. When you fill kids up on healthy fats, proteins, veggies and fruits, there isn't much room for sugary treats.

Get to Sleep!

Kids need a lot more sleep than we adults do, and even we don't often get enough. Think about this. Adults should have an average of 7-9 hours a night, while kids from the ages of 7-10 do best with around 11 hours at night. If we don't set up a focused bedtime routine, one that gets kids to bed early enough and with a sense of calm, their brains have a tendency to start getting wired again. It's like missing the last train, and now we're in for a night! This is more so for really young children, but often times the habit is set up early on. An appropriate bedtime for kids ages 7-10 years old is around 8pm when waking around 7am. Try to schedule after school activities to work with this. It will make a world of difference to their growth.

Fats, Protein, Veggies, and Fruit...oh my!

Further hitting on dietary support here. Ensure an adequate diet of healthy foods that are conducive to brain health. Ideally, grassfed-pastured meats, raw/grassfed dairy if appropriate (I find many kids have problems with dairy so best to check with your naturopathic doctor if this is ok), clean and fresh (or fresh frozen) vegetables and fruits. More veggies than fruit by 4:1. Keep veggies either raw or gently steamed or roasted. Use healthy spices and herbs to flavor and add medicinal value. When you find that your child is not eating much of what you are providing then it's time to bring supplementation on board to ensure plenty of vitamins, minerals, and fatty acids are being consumed.

Get The Wiggles Out!

Physical exercise and playtime are known to help with several areas of health including mental health. When the body is getting daily movement, the blood is circulating better and bringing nutrients and oxygen to the entire body, including the brain. Exercise is known to increase endorphins and benefit the processing and usage of neurotransmitters. Exercise uses excess glucose and other energy sources sustainably to help with regulation of sleep and other important daily lifestyle factors. Understanding this, exercise will only benefit any child with ADHD. This has been

evident in several designed studies to observe the benefit. One study showed a 30% improvement over those with ADHD in mental tasks after physical exercise, and 40% better than those without ADHD. Remember to include adequate water and hydration.

Nutritional Supplementation!

Try as we may, it can be difficult to get all of our nutrition in our food alone these days. There are many reasons for this, but primarily, our food is often not as nutritious as it used to be. This is due to our soil being over farmed, depleted, and not replenished with nutrients from proper cover cropping and other bio-dynamic farming techniques. With that general concern for most of us, this can cause even more of an issue for children who are already picky eaters and diagnosed with ADHD. Some of the main supplements that have been demonstrated in research to provide the most benefit to kids with ADHD are as follows:

- Omega-3 fatty acids
- Zinc
- Probiotics
- Magnesium

All of these can be supplied in a couple of capsules, chewable, or liquid daily to help supply the typically depleted nutrients in the daily diet. In general, while kids are growing into eating a healthy diet, I usually recommend parents include at least a quality sourced multi, fish oil, and probiotic to help mitigate not just ADHD tendencies but also low moods and other behavioral and mental/emotional concerns.

As you can see there are many ways to approach ADHD in children. With all the above on board, I like to find the correct homeopathic remedy for each child. Homeopathy is amazing medicine that can balance the mental/emotional and other behavioral tendencies of the ADHD child. I have seen it benefit each one of the children I see in practice for ADHD. If you are finding it difficult to make the changes listed above, reach out for guidance. We are here to help you and your family achieve your optimal health goals.

Reference

Muntaner-Mas A, Ortega FB, Femia P et al. Low cardiorespiratory fitness and obesity for ADHD in childhood and adolescence: A 6-year cohort study. *Scand J Med Sci Sports*. 2021; 31: 903-913. [[link](#)]

Silva, A. P., Prado, S. O. S., Scardovelli, T. A., Boschi, S. R. M. S., Campos, L. C., &

Frère,A. F. (n.d.). *Measurement of the effect of physical exercise on the concentration of individuals with adhd*. PLOS ONE. Retrieved September 27, 2021, from <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0122119>.

Huss M, Völp A, Stauss-Grabo M. Supplementation of polyunsaturated fatty acids, magnesium and zinc in children seeking medical advice for attention-deficit/hyperactivity problems - an observational cohort study. *Lipids Health Dis*. 2010 Sep 24;9:105. doi: 10.1186/1476-511X-9-105. PMID: 20868469; PMCID: PMC2955638.