

Integrative Approaches to ADHD

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Introduction

- While medication can be helpful for ADD/ADHD, there are several non-pharmacologic options, which can support treatment and in certain cases address the problem at the root and obviate the need for medication.
- The most effective integrative approaches to ADHD include: sleep, exercise, blood sugar stabilization, supplementation, behavioral techniques and nutritional optimization (eliminating artificial food coloring, additives and preservatives; addressing food allergies and repletion of micronutrient deficiencies).
- Note: do not make changes to your medication without consulting your doctor.

Sleep

- Sleep is the single most important factor in ADHD management.
- If you're experiencing difficulty with attention, focus, organization or motivation, you may not be getting sufficient *quantity* or *quality* of sleep.
- Aim for 8 hours of sleep nightly.
- Stop caffeine by 12pm; decrease or eliminate overall caffeine consumption.
- Be strategic about light. Get bright light in the morning and dim light at night:
 - o Open your blinds when you wake up; get outside during the day; avoid wearing sunglasses
 - o Download *f.lux* on your computer (a free program that dims your screen in the evening)
 - o Consider wearing orange-tinted glasses at night to block exposure to melatonin-suppressing light
 - Rec: Uvex Ultra-Spec 2000 Safety Glasses ~\$7 on Amazon
 - o Consider brushing your teeth, taking a nighttime bath or shower and reading in bed by candlelight
 - Rec: GoodLight non-toxic candles
- Turn off electronics and wind down for 1 hour before bed. Read a book in bed (wearing the orange glasses).
- Avoid TV, phone, iPad, work, Netflix, Hulu, and videogames in bed.
- Take a spoonful of coconut oil right before bed to maintain stable blood sugar throughout the night.
- Take magnesium at bedtime (Rec: Pure Encapsulations Magnesium Glycinate 400mg).
- Reduce or eliminate alcohol intake; alcohol alters sleep architecture and prevents deep sleep.
- Stick to a regular sleep schedule as much as possible.
- If you have any reason to think you have obstructive sleep apnea (interrupted breathing while you sleep), talk to your doctor about doing a sleep study. In my practice I see a correlation between sleep apnea and ADHD.

Exercise

- Exercise can increase your energy, focus and productivity, and it improves the quality of your sleep.
- Try to do anything for any amount of time every day.
- Build small amounts of exercise into your day: walk to work, take a 20-minute walk after dinner, take the stairs, do 10 minutes of yoga, hold plank position for 1 minute, get a standing desk or treadmill desk.
- While you walk, call a friend, listen to audiobooks from Audible.com, or try the Downcast app for podcasts.
- Some days you may just do 10-20 minutes of exercise at home. That's fine.
- Try www.yogaglo.com, www.yogavibes.com, www.fitnessglo.com or videos on Hulu and YouTube.
- Yoga and Tai Qi are particularly beneficial for ADHD.

Blood Sugar Stabilization

- If your blood sugar is on a rollercoaster, you may struggle with focus and attention.
- When your blood sugar is low, your brain is the first thing to "go on strike."
- Blood sugar dips if you miss a meal or if you recently ate a meal high in sugar or refined carbohydrates.
- Take steps to maintain stable blood sugar so your brain has a consistent energy source:
 - o Eat 3 meals and 2 snacks everyday; don't skip meals
 - o Eat protein & natural fat (coconut oil, olive oil, ghee & butter from pastured cows) at every meal
 - o Take a spoonful of coconut oil upon waking and before bed
 - o Consider starting your day with "bulletproof coffee" (coffee/tea blended with butter and MCT oil)
 - o Always have a snack handy (nuts, hard-boiled egg, dark chocolate, Epic™ jerky, almond butter)

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Nutrition

- Eating a diet high in processed food exacerbates ADHD symptoms. Eat *real food* and avoid processed food.
- There is evidence that artificial food coloring, preservatives and additives contribute to ADHD symptoms.
- Eliminate food coloring, which is found in processed food, candy, gum, soda, skim milk, energy drinks, farmed salmon, soy sauce, gummy vitamins & many over the counter and prescription medications (it's ubiquitous!).
- Eliminate artificial flavoring, preservatives and food additives, such as MSG (found in processed foods).
- Avoid other problematic substances such as sugar, artificial sweeteners, diet soda, gluten, GMO foods and industrial vegetable oils (e.g., canola oil).
- Eat pastured meat, eggs and poultry, wild fish, organ meats, veggies, starchy tubers, fermented foods, bone broth, nuts, seeds, sprouted rice and legumes, and plenty of natural fats (butter, ghee, coconut oil, olive oil).
 - o Seafood: www.vitalchoice.com
 - o Pastured meats: www.grasslandbeef.com
 - o Fermented foods: www.wisechoicemarket.com & www.hawthornevalleyfarm.org
 - o Sprouted rice: TruRoots Organic Germinated Rice & Lentils
- Consider a 2-month trial of a gluten/dairy elimination diet if you experience digestive issues, constipation, diarrhea, IBS, acne, severe allergies, chronic sinus congestion, reflux, heartburn, migraine, eczema, thyroid issues, brain fog, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia or autoimmune disease.
- Note: if you decide to eliminate dairy, you can continue to consume pastured butter and ghee.
- Other common food intolerances include soy, egg, corn, peanuts, GMO foods, shellfish, tree nuts, and citrus.
- If you suffer from migraines, acid reflux, hives, nasal congestion or anxiety in addition to ADHD, consider reading further about histamine intolerance (www.chriskresser.com, search histamine intolerance).

Behavioral Changes

- Organize your day with a "To Do" list and a daily detailed schedule.
- Use a Pomodoro Technique app to manage time (work for 25 minutes, then take a 3-5 minute break). Do something physically active during these breaks (e.g., jumping jacks or simply stand up and walk around).
- Have a designated place at home and at work for your phone, wallet and keys.
- Write everything down (appointments, grocery lists, anything you want to keep track of).
- Use a checklist for packing your suitcase for travel.
- Turn off notifications and sounds on your phone and computer.
- Check your email in batches every couple of hours rather than any time you receive a new email.
- Consider productivity resources such as RescueTime, Chrome Nanny, StayFocused, Lift.do or Anti-Social
- If you're having trouble focusing, do a breathing exercise, e.g., skull-cleansing breath (watch on YouTube).
- Practice daily mindfulness meditation.

Supplement Recommendations

- Supplements can be helpful, but they're never a replacement for diet and lifestyle modifications.
- I recommend the following supplements *in addition* to everything else in this handout.

Morning

- **Fish oil** – *Green Pastures Blue Ice Royal Butter Oil Fermented Cod Liver Oil Cinnamon Tingle Flavor*
 - o I recommend the gel, but if you think you won't tolerate it, take capsules instead
- **Multivitamin or B Complex** – *Pure Encapsulations Nutrient 950 with Vitamin K* or *Integrative Therapeutics Active B Complex*
- **Coconut Oil, MCT Oil** or **Brain Octane Oil** – *Bulletproof, Artisana* or *Dr. Bronners*
- **Rhodiola Rosea** – *Pure Encapsulations* or *Swedish Herbal Institute Arctic Root* – only after a discussion with your doctor and under close medical supervision - not safe for bipolar

At Bedtime

- **Magnesium** – *Pure Encapsulations Magnesium Glycinate* 200-400mg at bedtime
- **Coconut Oil** or **MCT Oil** – take a spoonful before bed