

ADHD without medication

And how to reduce the exploding number of ADHD-diagnoses



Version March 2012

Nederlands Comité voor de Rechten van de Mens

Introduction.

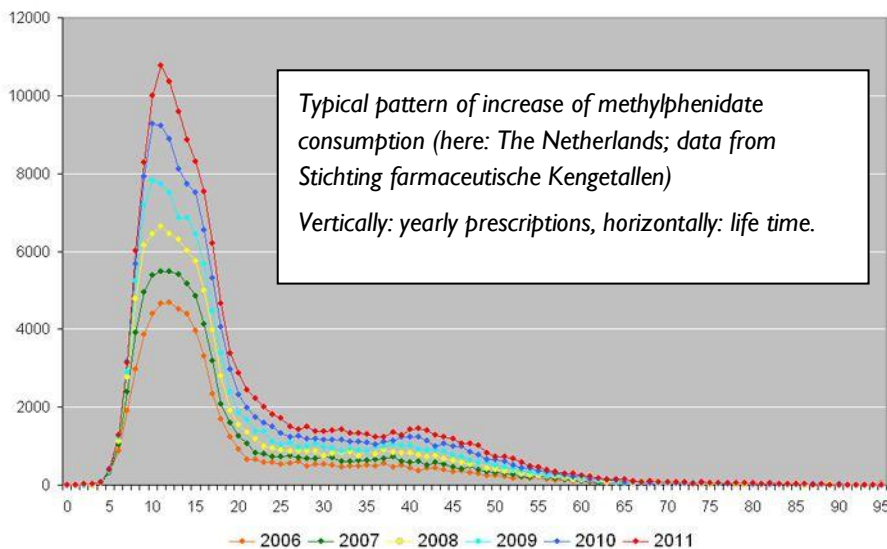
In Western countries the number of ADHD and ADD-diagnosed children and therefore the number of children who get prescribed psychiatric medication, increased significantly during the last decade.

These children and their parents do not receive adequate assistance or information about the underlying problem or the cause of ADHD symptoms. Instead, more and more medication is being used to keep symptoms under control. The most commonly prescribed drugs are based on the psychostimulant methylphenidate. As there is no trend break in the increase of the number of ADHD diagnosis, it seems likely that in the near future an increasing number of children are at risk by the lack of proper treatment of the symptoms.

More and more the question is asked whether ADHD and ADD are actually real, existing diseases. Dr. Allen Frances, leader of the task force that brought about the current version of DSM IV, speaks of a:

"(...) huge, unintended false "epidemic " of ADD, as a result of an incorrect diagnosis description which in turn caused the" capture [or] many "patients" who might have been far better off never entering the mental health system."

A clear discussion about ADHD is complicated by several circumstances. The lack of complete information on behavior problems and their causes, and the influence of diet and specific deficiencies play an important role. ADHD-like behavior may be caused by medical, familial, nutritional and educational circumstances. The influence of misleading marketing campaigns of pharmaceutical companies and their influence on the creation of theories on the cause of mental disorders is not sufficiently mapped and leads to ignore or even deny the underlying causes of ADHD symptoms. It is also highly debatable whether responsible bodies pay attention to the fact that research agencies are questioning the (alleged) positive effects of medication on learning and social behavior.



Side effects of the medication are an important aspect in this matter. The psycho-stimulants most commonly prescribed for ADHD, like methylphenidate-containing products such as Ritalin and Concerta, are considered to be drugs and for these medicines a long list of side effects are known. Harmlessness for the nervous system in the long term has not been demonstrated. The increasing use of Ritalin as a street drug (*kiddies cocaine*) is alarming.

This summary is intended to be a checklist for starting an alternative approach for treatment of ADHD symptoms.

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Citizen Commission on Human Rights was founded in 1969 by the Scientology Church and prof. Dr. Thomas Szasz. CCHR (<https://secure.cchr.org/>)

ADHD alternative therapeutic approach

There is too little governmental support for honest investigation into alternative, non-medicinal therapies.¹ Psycho-stimulants for ADHD diagnosis and therapy (such as Ritalin) seem in practice an easy and acceptable solution for parents, schools as well as for the practitioner. Unfortunately, this is one of the reasons why alternative therapies get hardly any attention, for both research budgets, and the dissemination of knowledge about the existence of such alternative therapies and treatment. Those alternative therapies address the actual cause and may fully remove the symptoms and cure the child.

This situation is not characteristic for Europe, but occurs in a large number of developed countries. Psychologist Elliot Valenstein notes that people:

““(..) are forced to depend on information that is really promotional material or at the very least, is information that is filtered and shaped by various interests groups(..) What physicians and the public are reading about drugs and what causes mental disorders is by no means a neutral reflection of all the information that is available.”²

After many years of influence by theories about functioning of the psyche and information controlled by pharmaceutical companies even medical professionals have come to believe in statements like "there is no real treatment for ADHD", which easily lead to years long medication.³

A Dutch example of the scarcity of research budget for medication-free therapy could be the research of dr. Lidy Pelsler on the effect of an exclusion diet for children with ADHD. Pelsler showed that with approx. 70% of children ADHD phenomena disappeared by modifying the diet.⁴ Though the therapy in 2009 attracted media attention, Pelsler reported at that time the struggle to get a research budget, which was a relatively small amount compared to what drug research receives.

Other nutritionists suggest links between junk food and fast food and its effect on the nervous system and behavior.⁵ Physical conditions, such as toxins, mercury and lead poisoning, can lead to ADHD-like behavior.

¹ Referring to the diet therapy of drs. Pelsler, getting attention in the media in 2009 because of the problems getting funding for her research budget, being a relatively small amount of money compared with drug research. Also see <http://www.rivm.nl/bibliotheek/rapporten/350021001.pdf>

² Elliot S. Valenstein, Ph.D., *Blaming the Brain*, The Free Press, New York, 1998, p. 220.

³ McNeil Pediatrics, a Division of McNeil-PPC, Inc. 2000-2007 Ft. Washington PA, USA. <http://www.concerta.net/concerta/pages/about-treatment.jsp> (accessed 5 January 2008); Eli Lilly and Company, http://strattera.com/1_9_faqs/1_9_faqs.jsp#ques1 (accessed 5 January 2008)

⁴ See publication of February 2011 in *The Lancet*, [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(10\)62227-1/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(10)62227-1/fulltext) Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee Report, Doc. 9456 of 7 May 2002, Controlling the diagnosis and treatment of hyperactive children in Europe. Also see <http://www.adhdenvoeding.nl/>

⁵ Example: Dr Rudy Proesmans, in the book: "Optimally healthy without medication: keep illness on a distance by taking the right food," p.53

A summary of alternative therapies for ADHD – like symptoms

The most important measure for limiting the number of ADHD-diagnosis and prescription of ADHD-medication is to investigate if the child is really suffering from a disease. Children differ largely from each other. Normal variations in temperament and personality should not be called a "disease".

About the DSM handbook, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, it is noted that "Clinicians complain that the current DSM-IV system poorly reflects the clinical realities of their patients. Researchers are skeptical that the existing DSM categories represent a valid basis for scientific investigations, and accumulating evidence supports this skepticism."⁶

Here we repeat the reference of page I, to the statement of Dr. Allen Frances.

In an article of two specialists about what they call diagnostic inflation they propose a stepwise approach of diagnose and therapy.⁷

As an illustration of what may go wrong with the ADHD diagnosis, we refer to a study by Michigan State University , showing that in the U.S. approximately 1 million children may be wrongly diagnosed with ADHD, simply because they were the youngest in the class.⁸ The youngest of the group in this study, were 60% more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than older children. This is caused by a deficient diagnostic procedure, while the doctor should take the difference in age of the child into account. The diagnosis in the US is often based on questionnaires, filled in by parents or teachers.

Enough sleep and Intensive body exercise; running

The therapeutic value of intensive, possibly daily, exercise is heavily underestimated. The most effective type of sports are probably basic activities such as running and swimming, preferably in a natural environment.

W. van der Steen, Gezondheidszorg: van harte beterschap? Een kijkje in de keuken van de psychiatrie, 2011

L.E. McCurdy , K.E. Winterbottom, S.S. Metha, J.R. Roberts, Using nature and outdoor activity to improve children's health. (2010)

N.H. Azrin, C.T. Ehle, A.L. Beaumont, Physical exercise as a reinforce to promote calmness of an ADHD child (2006)

Behavior therapy for parents

ADHD symptoms of children may improve if parents get behavior therapy.

H.L. Huang, C.H. Lu, H.W. Tsai, C.C. Chao, T.Y. Ho, S.F. Chuang, C.H. Tsai, P.C. Yang, (2009), Effectiveness of behavioral parent therapy in pre-school children with ADHD.

A thorough physical examination

Hypothyroidism includes symptoms of inability to concentrate and memory problems. ADHD also includes the symptom inability to concentrate, and forgetfulness can be mistaken for memory loss.

⁶ <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/dsm5/>

⁷ L. Batstra, A. Frances, 2011, Holding the Line against Diagnostic Inflation in Psychiatry.
<http://content.karger.com/produktedb/produkte.asp?DOI=000331565&typ=pdf>

⁸ http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2010-08-17-1Aadhd17_ST_N.htm; original article at <http://news.msu.edu/media/documents/2010/08/d686acc3-5efd-407e-a3ae-334f81b4593d.pdf>

Iron Deficiency in adults causes lethargy, feeling exhausted and irritability. In infants and children, however, the symptoms include irritability, inability to concentrate, impaired cognitive skills and a short attention span. Children with ADHD also show symptoms of inability to concentrate and are distracted easily, mimicking a short attention span.

Hypoglycemia, also called low blood sugar, can cause a number of symptoms similar to ADHD including aggression, hyperactivity, inability to sit still or a low concentration level. In addition, some people also have an adverse reaction to chemicals in food, such as MSG, red dye, corn syrup or additional additives. These reactions can include anger, agitation, impulsiveness, hyperactivity and lack of concentration.

Vitamin deficiency

Researchers mention a correlation between specific low vitamin levels and ADHD.⁹

Diet

Dr. Pelsser published a paper on positive effects of a restricted elimination diet on the behavior of children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (INCA study).¹⁰

Concentration defects may be caused by hearing defects – e.g. caused by chronic exposure to noise.

T. Kujala, E. Brattico, Detrimental noise effects on brains speech functions.

Influence of toxins, mercury, lead, PCB's, foodcolors

J.T. Nigg, M. Nikolas, M.G. Knotnerus, K. Cavanagh, K. Friderici (2010), Confirmation and extension of association of blood lead with ADHD and ADHD symptom domains at population-typical exposure levels.

P.A. Eubig, A. Aguilar, S.L. Schantz, (2010) Lead and PCB's as Risk Factors for ADHD

Medical conditions can lead to ADHD-like behavior, such as toxins, mercury and lead poisoning. An amendment to the Lead Poisoning Prevention Act, Illinois, USA, says that lead poisoning can cause: "(..) learning disabilities, speech problems, difficulties with concentration and behavioral problems."¹¹

A connection has been found between food color Tartrazine (E102) and ADHD.¹²

⁹ E.g. http://drclark.typepad.com/dr_david_clark/2010/07/adhd-linked-with-2-vitamin-mineral-deficiencies-.html

¹⁰ a randomised controlled trial The Lancet: [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(10\)62227-1/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(10)62227-1/fulltext)

¹¹ <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=1523&ChapterID=35>

¹² Rowe KS, Rowe KJ (November 1994). "Synthetic food coloring and behavior: a dose response effect in a double-blind, placebo-controlled, repeated-measures study"

Pesticide Exposure May Contribute to ADHD

Exposure to organophosphate pesticides, at levels common among U.S. children, may contribute to a diagnosis of ADHD.

Maryse F. Bouchard of the University of Montreal and Harvard University, David C. Bellinger, Robert O. Wright, and Marc G. Weisskopf of Harvard University. <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100517132846.htm>

School, education

ADHD-like symptoms may be caused by poor education. A child, being pushed to a next step in study, while former study material was not thoroughly understood and practiced, may have trouble staying focused, may be easily distracted or feels a strong urge to leave the classroom.

For an easy learning child the presentation of study material may go too slow, resulting in loss of attention.

In both cases better education would be the answer.

This subject deserves research, especially in areas where school teachers present information on ADHD-like behavior to mental health workers.

Prevention

TV and video may lead to ADHD

A study from the American Academy of Pediatrics shows that toddlers who watch videos may develop ADHD later in life.

Non-optimal food of the mother early in pregnancy

S.H. House, (2007) Nurturing the brain nutritionally and emotionally from before conception to late adolescence.

Mother smoking during pregnancy may result in ADHD.

Rosalind J Neuman, Elizabeth Lobos, Wendy Reich, Cynthia A Henderson, Ling-Wei Sun, Richard D Todd

In utero exposure to smoking and alcohol are common risk factors that have been associated with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in human beings and animal models.

Pesticide during pregnancy

Sharon K. Sagiv*, Sally W. Thurston, David C. Bellinger, Paige E. Tolbert, Larisa M. Altshul and Susan A. Korrick, 2009, Prenatal Organochlorine Exposure and Behaviors Associated With Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in School-Aged Children

<http://aje.oxfordjournals.org/content/171/5/593.abstract>