



# *Ask the Expert*



**National  
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## **Webcast Series**

**Presented by the  
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# ***Ask the Expert***

## What Else Can I Do?

### Complementary

### Approaches to ADHD Treatment



**Stephanie Moulton Sarkis**  
**PhD NCC LMHC**

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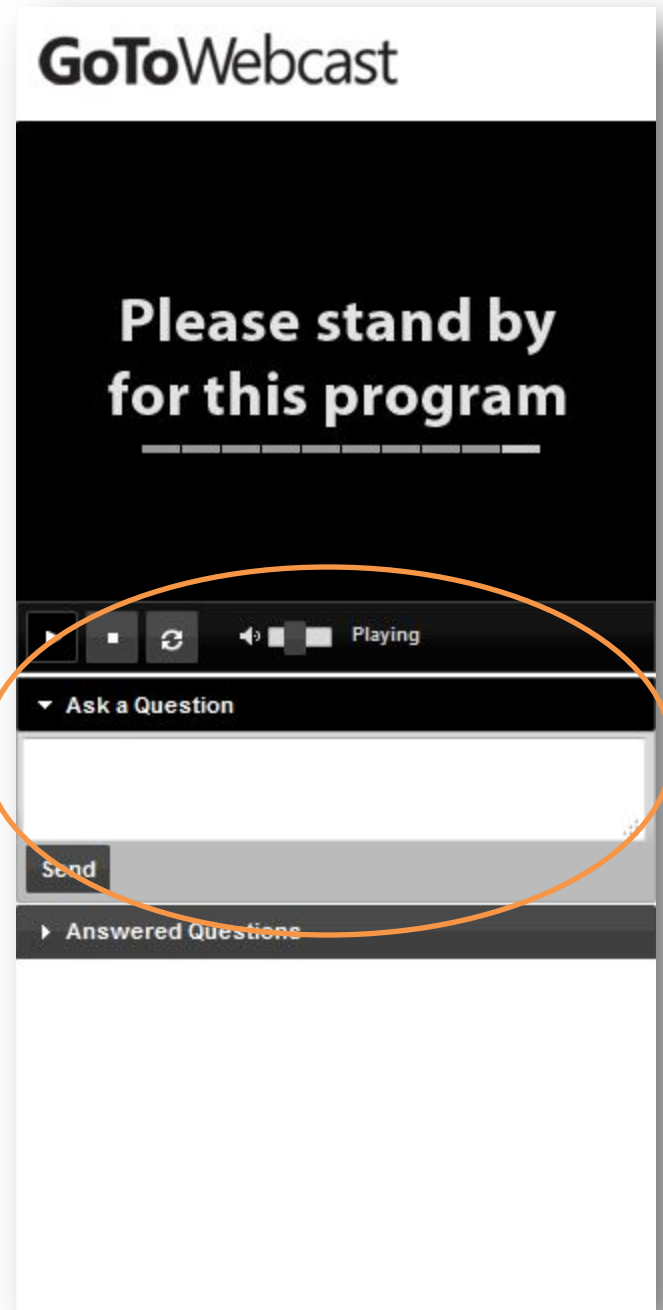
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**To Ask A Question:**





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**Stephanie Moulton Sarkis**  
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# Stephanie Moulton Sarkis PhD NCC LMHC

- Author of 5 books on adult ADHD
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# Most Effective Non-Medication Treatments for ADHD

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy
- Accommodations
- Exercise
- Mindfulness meditation
- Adequate sleep
- Omega 3-6-9
- Healthy diet

# Non-Medication Tips

- ADHD is treatable, but there is no cure
- The goal of treatment is to decrease the intensity and frequency of symptoms and improve quality of life
- Beware of contracts
- Do your research and ask questions
  - You want straight-forward answers
  - Every treatment has side effects

# Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for ADHD

- CBT concepts
  - Automatic thoughts and thought-stopping
  - Thinking distortions
- CBT has been found to be effective in treating ADHD in both individual and group counseling
  - (Solanto 2012; Safren, Sprich, Mimiaga, et al. 2010; Bramham et al. 2008)
  - Needs to be **ADHD-focused CBT**
    - (Solanto 2012)

# Accommodations

- Accommodations help people with ADHD work at the same level as their non-ADHD peers
- College
  - Apply at Office of Student Disability Services
  - Recommended accommodations include
    - Note taker in class
    - Extended time on tests
    - Testing in a separate and quiet location
    - Priority registration
    - Part-time course load counted as full-time

# Accommodations

- Workplace
  - Try informal accommodations first
  - Recommended accommodations include
    - Asking for verbal instructions to be sent in an email
    - Wearing noise-cancelling earbuds while working
    - Working in an empty conference room if employee does not have an office with a door
    - Having designated “do not disturb” times
    - Having a weekly one-on-one meeting with employer to make sure work goals are clarified and are being met

# Accommodations

- Workplace
  - If informal accommodations are not working, an employee can formally ask for accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
    - Requires employee to disclose diagnosis to employer
    - Seek consultation with an attorney that specializes in workplace and ADA issues first

# Exercise and ADHD

- Exercise
  - Raises the level of neurotransmitters in the brain
  - Significantly reduces ADHD symptoms
    - Also has been found to decrease anxiety and depression symptoms
  - Improves executive functioning even after 30 minutes of exercise
    - (Archer and Kostrzewa 2012; Gawrilow et al. 2013; Grassmann et al. 2014; Verburgh et al. 2013; Volkow et al. 2009)
  - Yoga, tai chi, and martial arts have all been found to significantly decrease ADHD symptoms
    - (Converse et al. 2014; Hariprasad et al. 2013; Lakes et al. 2013; Sánchez-López et al. 2013)



# Exercise and ADHD

- Exercising first thing in the morning gives a more lasting effect of increased dopamine throughout the day
- Teaming up with an exercise partner or a personal trainer and listening to music can help increase motivation
- Social apps can award points for exercise and provide encouragement

# Mindfulness Meditation Training and ADHD

- Mindfulness practices
  - Relaxation techniques
  - Focusing on breathing
  - Using mental imagery
  - Becoming more aware of the body and mind
- Has been found to reduce anxiety, depression, perceived stress, high blood pressure
  - (Parswani, Sharma, and Iyengar 2013)
- Helps people become more accepting of and positive about themselves and others
  - (Zylowska et al. 2012a)

# MMT and ADHD

- 8-week MMT program for adults and teens with ADHD
- 78% of people that completed the training reported reductions in ADHD symptoms
- 30% had clinically significant symptom improvement
- Improvements were made on executive function performance
- Also significant decreases in anxiety, depression, and stress

• (Zylowska et al. 2008)

# MMT and ADHD

- MMT has also been found to help parents of ADHD children
  - Parents reported
    - Significant reduction in their ADHD behavior
    - Reductions in parenting stress
    - Reductions in overreaction to his or her child's behavior
      - (van der Oord et al. 2012)

# MMT and ADHD

- **STOP acronym**
  - S = Stop (pause for a moment)
  - T = Take a deep breath
  - O = Observe mindfully in the moment (notice your body sensations or what you are doing)
  - P = Proceed with relaxation and awareness
    - (Zylowska 2012b)

# Sleep Issues and ADHD

- People with ADHD are more likely to have
  - Early (initial) insomnia
  - Middle insomnia
  - Terminal insomnia
  - Snoring
  - Obstructive sleep apnea
  - Restless leg syndrome
  - Movement while sleeping
  - Confusional arousals
  - Bruxism
    - (Silvestri et al. 2009)

# Adequate Sleep and ADHD

- Good sleep hygiene
  - Shut off electronics an hour before bed
    - (Wood et al. 2013)
  - Keep the same wake time and sleep time
  - Have a completely dark bedroom
  - Keep the bedroom at a comfortable temperature
  - Use background sound
- Get a sleep study to diagnose and rule out sleep disorders

# Dietary Supplements

- Includes vitamins, minerals, herbal supplements, Omegas
- As of 1994, supplements no longer need to be proven to the FDA to be safe before they are sold to consumers
  - (US FDA 2008)
- Some studies have found the concentration of an herbal supplement can vary greatly from bottle to bottle and even capsule to capsule
  - Zhao, Zhang et al. 2014; Curtis and Gaylord 2005)



# Omega Supplements

- People with ADHD may have a significantly lower level of omega-3 fatty acids in their blood than people without ADHD
  - (Hawkey and Nigg 2014; Schuchardt et al. 2010; Antalis et al. 2006)
- Low omega-3 levels can produce ADHD-like symptoms
  - Inattention
  - Lack of focus
  - Mood swings
  - Working memory difficulties
    - (Montgomery et al. 2013)

# Omega Supplements

- Omega-3, omega-6, and omega-9 have been found to boost this low level of omegas in the blood and improve ADHD symptoms
  - (Hawkey and Nigg 2014; Nguyen et al. 2014; Huss et al. 2010; Sinn et al. 2008; Sinn and Bryan 2007; Joshi et al. 2006; Young et al. 2005)
- Omegas may help neurons communicate more effectively, as seen on brain scans
  - (Bauer et al. 2014; Gow and Hibbeln 2014)
  - This assist to neurons can be seen in some cases after four weeks of taking omega-3 supplements
    - (Bauer et al. 2014)

# Omega Supplements

- Side effects
  - Omegas can act as anticoagulants (blood thinners)
    - Make sure your patients/clients talk to their prescriber first, especially if they are taking blood-thinning medications such as warfarin.
  - Stomach upset
  - Fish burp
    - Enteric-coated omegas and liquid omegas may reduce this side effect
- Consult with your doctor before starting any supplement

# ADHD and Diet

- People with ADHD
  - Tend to eat more and are more likely to be overweight and obese than the general population
    - (Cortese and Vincenzi 2012; Davis 2010; Pagoto et al. 2009; Strimas et al. 2008)
  - More likely to develop diabetes than the general population
    - (Chen et al. 2013)
  - High-fat, sugary, and salty foods may be used to self-medicate, and can trigger the same brain reactions as when abusing drugs
    - (Davis 2010)

# Food Additives, Dyes, and ADHD

- Food additives and coloring have been found to be related to increased hyperactivity
  - (Stevens et al. 2011; McCann et al. 2007)
- Decreasing or eliminating food dyes and additives may be helpful to everyone, not just those with ADHD
  - (Millichap and Yee 2012)

# Food Additives, Dyes, and ADHD

- Sodium benzoate
  - Preservative found in beverages and foods
    - Sodas and coffee drinks
  - Use has been found to be linked to a higher score on ADHD rating scales
    - (Beezhold, et al. 2014; Beezhold and Johnston 2012)
    - Is sodium benzoate triggering ADHD symptoms, are people self-medicating with caffeine in soda and coffee drinks, or a combination of both?

# Food Additives, Dyes, and ADHD

- Caffeine
  - Not recommended to treat ADHD
  - Only helps you focus for 30 minutes
  - Side effects to four or more cups of coffee a day include
    - Insomnia
    - Irritability
    - Stomach upset
    - Rapid heartbeat
    - Muscle tremors
  - (Mayo Clinic 2014)

# Food Additives, Dyes, and ADHD

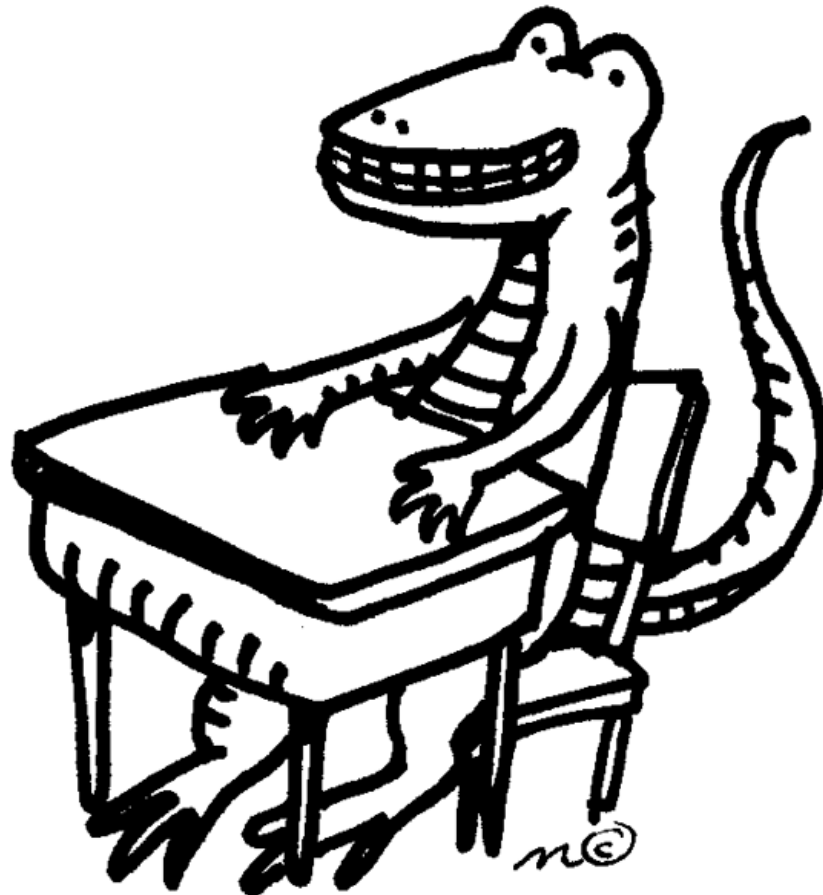
- Caffeine
  - Build up tolerance quickly
  - Caffeine withdrawal
    - Mood swings
    - Nausea
    - Headaches
  - Benefits do not outweigh the risks



# Summary

- There are alternative treatments available for ADHD
  - However
    - Do research on the treatments
    - Look at study methodology
    - Weigh benefit versus risk
    - Consider cost of treatment
    - Look at long-term gains
    - Avoid any treatment claiming it is a “cure” for ADHD

# Questions?



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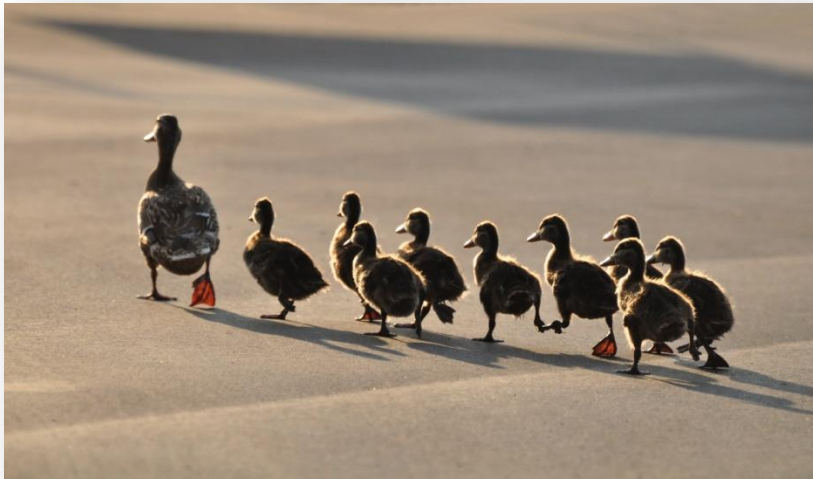


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