

Complementary and Alternative Treatments

What are the most effective nonmedication treatments for ADHD?

The nonmedication treatments for ADHD with the most data and research behind them are cognitive behavior therapy, accommodations at school and work, exercise, mindfulness meditation, adequate sleep, essential fatty acid supplementation, and a healthy diet. The goal of each of these treatments is to decrease the intensity and frequency of symptoms and therefore improve the quality of life for children and adults with ADHD.

Are there different complementary treatments for the different presentations of ADHD?

It hasn't been found that one type of treatment works better for the inattentive, the combined, or the hyperactive-impulsive types of ADHD. It's really about whatever works best for you. Studies look at all the different presentations of ADHD.

In order to determine what complementary treatment might work best, it is good to be open and try some things. Every body works a little bit differently, so something that works for a friend with ADHD may not work for you.

How long does it take before a complementary treatment reduces ADHD symptoms or there is an improvement in behavior?

It depends on the treatment. You can ask the treatment provider, "How long is this treatment supposed to take?"

One of the best ways to track improvements is by keeping a log and writing down the changes in behavior. What do you notice during the day? Does your child snap less at people? Does he or she think about things before completing an action? It's hard to remember all the changes without writing them down. With a log you can then look for a pattern to see if things are improving or not.



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What are the top recommendations of nonmedication treatment for young children?

For young children, definitely exercise has been found effective. It's important to let kids run around outside and play. Mindfulness, and particularly the teaching of deep breathing, can be helpful to children under the age of six.

For kindergartners, school accommodations can also be quite effective. An accommodation you can ask for is for movement in the classroom to not be counted off as a conduct mark. Meaning that kids are allowed to get out of their seat and out of circle time and not be penalized.

How can you help young kids with impulse control?

Letting some things go is important.

The brain with ADHD doesn't have a stop sign that pops up between thought and action. The brain thinks, "That looks fun, let's do it," and then you end up with the consequences. So as a parent when you let some things go, you are accommodating for the difference in how an ADHD brain functions.

To implement this, have three things that you will not negotiate on. Those are things like safety and having a rule to hold hands when crossing the street. For other things, like a messy room, just shut the door.

It's important to use positive reinforcement as well. Catch your kids being good and emphasize their positive behaviors. The more parents do this, the more kids will show continued good behavior. 🍎

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