

Five Popular Approaches to

by Bryan Goodman

YEARS OF SCIENCE-BASED RESEARCH HAVE SHOWN THAT THERE ARE EFFECTIVE WAYS TO TREAT ADHD.

Experts generally accept that the most effective treatment plans for children with ADHD combine parent training, behavioral intervention strategies, an appropriate education plan, education about ADHD, and carefully managed medication when necessary. These are considered evidence-based; professionals and the National Institute of Mental Health refer to this as “multimodal treatment.”

For treating adults, of course, the above list would be modified.

While these treatments work for countless people, there are others who claim that approaches such as diet and exercise have helped them. Although there may not be much—if any—research to back up some of these claims, most experts would be reluctant to criticize anything that could uniquely help someone, even if the improvement is based on what is referred to in research-speak as “the placebo effect.”

Here we summarize five popular approaches to treating ADHD. As you will see, some of the claims have more validity than others.



DIET

While the available evidence is not conclusive that what a person eats causes hyperactivity and inattentiveness, there is every indication that people with ADHD, as well as the entire population for that matter, should be attentive to what they eat. It's particularly important for you to know how the medication you're taking affects your nutritional status. For those who lose their appetite and then do not eat a balanced diet because of ADHD medication, there could be a need for dietary supplements, says L. Eugene Arnold, MD, MEd, a researcher and member of CHADD's professional advisory board. He recommends taking a multivitamin, drinking a nutritional supplement, or making your own milkshake that includes omega-3s and crushed vitamins and minerals. Of course, you should always notify your treatment professional of any side effects of treatment. To learn more about good nutritional habits and to plan daily and weekly menus, visit mypyramidtracker.gov.



EXERCISE

There is a great deal of research showing that exercise has a positive impact on the brain and can aid in the treatment of depression. But what about its effects on ADHD? John Ratey, MD, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and the author of *Spark: The Revolutionary Science of Exercise and the Brain*, says that exercise does make a difference to the ADHD brain. Not only is there research showing exercise activates key areas of the brain that affect people with ADHD, but, says Ratey, the rigid discipline and structure of a routine can also be very good for people with the disorder. “For most of my patients, I suggest exercise as a tool to help them manage their symptoms along with their medication,” Ratey says. He suggests starting with thirty minutes of cardio exercise. An extra bonus: You'll feel great.



Treating ADHD

What does the research show?
How experimental are they?
Attention has details...



MEDITATION

The available research is not conclusive about meditation as an effective treatment of ADHD. But one only has to look at the impact on the practice of countless people over the last 2500 years to see that meditation can calm the brain. For people who are feeling a great deal of stress because of a hectic office environment, for example, meditation may prove to be effective. And there's nothing wrong with incorporating it with other, more proven, forms of treatment. Plus, if you're involved in a regular meditation group, the structure may prove to be quite helpful. Claims from companies or religious groups that meditation is a way of treating ADHD should be carefully scrutinized, however. As always, any experimental treatments should be shared with your treatment professional.



activity to solve problems, says Nancy Ratey, a leader in the coaching community and a former CHADD professional advisory board member. "The goal is for the client to increase self-awareness, build an arsenal of strategies to draw upon, and develop the confidence in his or her own ability to self-manage." Not all self-proclaimed coaches have the necessary skills and experience, however. For more information, contact the ADHD Coaches Organization at adhdcoaches.org. ACO is a nonprofit association created to advance the profession of ADHD coaching worldwide.



COACHING

Coaching is an emerging field that seeks to help individuals accomplish their life goals. The coaching relationship is intended to help people achieve better results in their lives—academically, professionally, socially, or in any area of life in which they want to improve. While more in-depth evidence-based research is needed to validate the efficacy of this new field, preliminary pilot studies are showing that ADHD coaching has a significant positive effect on adults with ADHD and enables them to better manage executive functions: self-regulate emotions, prioritize, maintain motivation, and sustain attention. It is becoming increasingly clear that coaching may be a helpful supplement to other interventions. Coaches use strength-based strategies and their clients' own innate cre-



NEUROFEEDBACK

Supporters of neurofeedback say that it can be used as a tool to train the brain to increase the levels of alertness and thereby reduce ADHD symptoms. CHADD sent a letter to the leadership at the National Institute of Mental Health requesting that more research be conducted to determine the effectiveness of neurofeedback. Until more studies are conducted, those interested in neurofeedback should investigate it thoroughly—start by visiting help4adhd.org, the National Resource Center on ADHD—and consult with a treatment professional before spending a great deal of money.



There are many treatment approaches out there that may not have a lot of research behind them. It would be helpful to have more research that would lend a better understanding of some alternative treatments. You can play a role. Consider participating in research at one of your local universities or research centers.

Adults with ADHD and parents of children with ADHD should always investigate treatment options and discuss them thoroughly with knowledgeable treatment professionals. Always discuss the decision to try alternative treatments with your treatment professional. More information about ADHD and treatment options can be found at chadd.org or help4adhd.org. ●

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FOR MORE INFO

Visit help4adhd.org, the website of CHADD's National Resource Center on ADHD, for What We Know sheets #6, #6A, and #18, which contain more in-depth discussions of diet, coaching, and complementary and alternative treatments for ADHD.

