

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Patrick Ryan, DC

Research Shows Chiropractic May Alleviate ADHD

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most commonly diagnosed conditions in children. Consequently, a rocketing number of children are being medicated with potentially damaging drugs. Dr. Ryan is extremely concerned about this trend.

Although doctors of chiropractic do not specifically treat psychological problems like ADHD, a number of studies show that chiropractic intervention can make a genuine difference for children with ADHD. And chiropractic can help eliminate the need for medications. Dr. Ryan has compiled a sampling of this exciting research below.

The Latest Research

A hot-off-the-presses study published in the journal *Explore* indicates that chiropractic care may significantly reduce symptoms of ADHD.

The analysis pooled data on four patients with ADHD. The participants ranged in age from 9 to 13 years. Progress was monitored with questionnaires completed by the patients' parents and teachers. The children underwent chiropractic care for a minimum of five months (*Explore* 2010;6:173-82).



Findings showed significant improvement in symptoms such as hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattentiveness, as well as behavioral, social or emotional difficulties.

The study's authors write: "This provides supporting evidence on the benefits of chiropractic spinal manipulative therapy." (*Explore* 2010;6:173-82.)

Another recent analysis Dr. Ryan finds interesting looked at 157 children with developmental delay syndromes, including ADHD. The study population was comprised of 86 boys and 71 girls between the ages of 6 to 13 years "with difficulties in reading, learning, social interaction, and school performance."

Before and after receiving a course of chiropractic care, a certified speech therapist gave the children eight standardized psychometric tests, "which evaluate 20 separate areas of cognitive function, including patient- or parent-reported improvements in school performance, social interaction, and sporting activities." (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2009;32:660-9.)

"Individual and group data showed that at the end of treatment, the 157

children showed improvements in the 8 psychometric tests and 20 areas of cognitive function compared with their values before treatment. Their ability to concentrate, maintain focus and attention, and control impulsivity and their performance at home and school improved."

The study concludes that chiropractic care "reduced symptoms and enhanced the cognitive performance in this group of children." (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2009;32:660-9.)

Previous Research

While the latest research is exciting, Dr. Ryan also wants patients to be aware of previous research showing that chiropractic care may alleviate ADHD.

One experiment published in 2004 followed eight boys and one girl with medically diagnosed ADHD. The youths ranged in age from 2 to 15 years. They received chiropractic care and nutritional supplements. Before, during and after the patients' chiropractic care, parents and teachers completed surveys assessing the patients' behavior and school performance.

Comparison of the first and last parents' surveys revealed a 53 percent reduction in ADHD symptoms. Teacher surveys indicated a 45 percent reduction.

In the beginning of the study, five of the nine patients were taking ADHD medications. Following chiropractic care three of these patients were able to discontinue medication due to symptom improvement. The remaining two were able to significantly decrease their dosage.

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“The results of this study suggest that patients with ADHD may benefit from chiropractic care utilizing a combination of full spine spinal manipulative therapy and nutritional supplementation,” conclude the study’s authors (*Pathways Fam Well* 2004;4).

Another study was conducted at Mississippi State University. Findings showed significant progress in hyperactive kids who underwent chiropractic care. Interestingly, there appeared to be an association between x-ray signs of spinal dysfunction and attention problems.

The majority of the patients improved after a series of visits; their behavioral scores increased, as did their interest levels. The study concluded that chiropractic care is potentially an important nondrug intervention for hyperactivity (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 1989;12:353).

Case Studies

A number of case studies indicate that chiropractic is beneficial for youngsters with attention problems.

One study looked at a 5-year-old child who had unsuccessful pharmacological treatment for ADHD, even though the pediatrician had tried many different drugs including Ritalin®, Adderall® and Haldol®.

After three years of drug treatment, the child’s parents decided to try chiropractic. The patient’s chiropractor determined that the spine of the patient’s neck (cervical spine) was out of alignment. Specifically, the child had a reversal of the normal front-to-back curve, or a forward leaning neck posture. The medical term for this extremely common condition is cervical kyphosis.

During 35 visits over eight weeks, the child’s neck was restored to a more normal posture. “During chiropractic care, the child’s facial tics resolved and his behavior vastly improved.” (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2004;27:e14.)

After the eight weeks, the child exhib-

ited no further symptoms of ADHD. In addition, the child’s pediatrician “concluded that the reduction in symptoms was significant enough to discontinue the medication.” The study concluded that “there may be a possible connection that correction of cervical kyphosis in patients with ADHD may produce a desirable clinical outcome.” (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2004;27:e14.)

Another case centers on a 4-year-old boy diagnosed with ADHD and other developmental delays. He experienced temper tantrums, poor speech quality, reduced short-term memory skills and was easily distracted. His care included a combination of chiropractic, special diet and nutritional supplementation (*JVSR* 2007:1-4). His mother and teachers reported tremendous improvement in all aspects of his condition.

Another case analysis determined that chiropractic care for a child with ADHD appeared to reduce his pain and boost concentration, allowing him to learn and “sit still” (*JVSR* 2006:1).

Theories on How Chiropractic Care May Alleviate ADHD

Just how might chiropractic improve attention? One theory suggests that problems in the spine (**vertebral subluxations**) may affect the central nervous system in a manner that predisposes a child to emotional problems.

Vertebral subluxation occurs when the vertebrae (spinal bones) are subjected to functional or structural changes, which affect the spine and how it supports the body. People often adapt physically to these changes in ways that trigger disturbances in the central nervous system, as well as in other organs throughout the body. Naturally, this condition compromises general health, and influences behavior and emotional well-being.

Another theory holds that physical pain and discomfort make it impossible for a child to pay full attention. Chiropractic care alleviates discomfort, in turn upping attention span.

Help a Child in Your Life Avoid Hazardous Medication

ADHD medication may be hazardous. Side-effects range from headache and digestive problems to serious emotional problems and cardiovascular disease. Some research indicates that these drugs may actually permanently alter the brains of those taking it (*J Child Neurol* 2007;22:812-7). And, these medications are habit-forming. They may lead to drug abuse and addiction.

Alarmingly, some educators and health-care providers are quick to apply the ADHD label to any active child, and recommend medication — even though these professionals may not be adequately trained in diagnosing the disorder. Many experts speculate that the disorder is being grossly over-diagnosed, and many children are being medicated unnecessarily. If you suspect that your child might have ADHD, ask us about how and where to have your child properly evaluated.

Recent research illustrates that brain differences in children with ADHD may resolve during the teenage years (*Proc Natl Acad Sci* 2007;104:19649-54). Consequently, some scientists speculate that prescribing ADHD medication to young children may be jumping the gun — and could do more harm than good.

Fortunately, the growing body of research suggests that chiropractic may help mitigate ADHD, reducing or eliminating the need for medication.

If a child in your life has attention problems, please share this handout with that child’s parents, and encourage them to schedule an appointment with our office today.

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