

Diet and ADHD

Some families may be concerned about possible links between additives and ADHD.

- The current NICE guidance: Information for parents of children with ADHD (last updated 2016) says:

“If you or a healthcare professional have noticed any food or drink that seems to affect your child’s behaviour you should be advised to keep a diary of what your child eats and drinks, and their behaviour afterwards. If there seems to be a link between certain food and drink and your child's behaviour, you should be offered an appointment with a dietitian.

There is little evidence that dietary supplements such as fatty acids (omega 3 or omega 6), or cutting out foods containing artificial colouring and other additives, can help children with ADHD.

There is limited evidence that following a diet containing a small number of foods (sometimes called a 'restricted' or 'few foods' diet) may improve symptoms of ADHD in children in the short term. But there is no evidence about long-term benefits or possible harms, and keeping to this type of restricted diet is difficult”

- The NICE guideline information for health professionals: *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Diagnosis and Management*, says:

“Healthcare professionals should stress the value of a balanced diet, good nutrition and regular exercise for children, young people and adults with ADHD. The elimination of artificial colouring and additives from the diet is not recommended as a generally applicable treatment for children and young people with ADHD.

Clinical assessment of ADHD in children and young people should include asking about foods or drinks that appear to influence their hyperactive behaviour. If there is a clear link, healthcare professionals should advise parents or carers to keep a diary of food and drinks taken and ADHD behaviour. If the diary supports a relationship between specific foods and drinks and behaviour, then referral to a dietitian should be offered. Further management (for example, specific dietary elimination) should be jointly undertaken by the dietitian, mental health specialist or paediatrician, and the parent or carer and child or young person.

Healthcare professionals should not advise or offer dietary fatty acid supplementation for treating ADHD in children and young people. Family members or carers of children with ADHD should be advised that there is no

evidence about the long-term effectiveness or potential harms of a ‘few food’ diet for children with ADHD, and only limited evidence of short-term benefits”

(NICE clinical guideline 72 Issued: September 2008, last modified: February 2016. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg72>)

- For parents and carers who prefer not to buy foods containing certain colours there is a regularly updated list of food ranges which do not use sunset yellow FCF (E110), quinoline yellow (E104), carmoisine (E122), allura red (E129), tartrazine (E102), ponceau 4R (E124)

The list is produced by the Food Standards Agency and you can view it at <http://www.food.gov.uk/policy-advice/additivesbranch/foodcolours/colourfree/manufacturers>

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