

Ayurveda, Hyperactivity and Attention Deficit Disorder

Ayurvedic Medicine approaches the subject of Hyperactivity and Attention Deficit Disorder from an elemental and doshic perspective. It is this understanding that leads to a complete model of management that is truly holistic and integrates the care of the body, mind, and spirit of the patient.

Reviewing the five elements, earth is the capacity for stability in the body and mind. Water is the capacity for flow and feeling. Fire is the capacity for discrimination and digestion. Air is the capacity for motion, both physical and the movement of thought. Ether is the capacity for expansiveness and creativity. In the case of hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder, there is an excess in the qualities of air and ether and a deficiency in the qualities of earth. Hence, from the perspective of Ayurveda^[1], ADD and ADHD are conditions of increased expansive and creative energies and a decrease in stability. The end result is a person who can go into creative spaces that others can not enter and therefore thinks outside of the normal perceptive view of the general population. The loss of stability is required to enter the realm they are in. Increases in the qualities of the elements air and ether are called a “vata disturbance” by practitioners of Ayurveda. While the condition has its creative advantages, it can also reach a degree of disturbance in which it becomes difficult to function well in the world of common experience.

The Ayurvedic approach to the management of ADD and ADHD is the process of assisting the patient to build a stronger container to control the energy of expansion and creativity. The container ideally creates a state of control without creating suppression of the increased energies.

Managing any condition through Ayurveda requires care for the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of the patient. Patients with vata disturbances often experience physical conditions such as constipation and gas in the digestive system and dryness through out the body. There may also be of low body weight and poor muscular development. Patients often feel cold. Care of the physical body is essential to the care of the mind. Hence, a diet that is nourishing, oily and somewhat heavy is important as long as the patient does not become overweight. Overweight patients require a similar diet but with smaller portions. Nourishment is the key to increasing stability.

Spiritually, Ayurveda views all people as being in the physical world for the purpose of learning important lessons which ultimately aid the soul toward the attainment of enlightenment. Every difficult life circumstance is a lesson or opportunity for growth. What is to be learned is not often easy for another person to identify. Learning is an internal process of self-observation. While children find self-observation difficult, it is important that parents create a supportive environment for self-exploration at the child’s pace. This can include reading books with important morals and which demonstrate growing self awareness and planting subtle seeds of insight that might germinate in the child’s future. Child counselors can also play an important role through the variety of techniques they are trained in to affect a child’s consciousness.

On the mental level and emotional level, Ayurveda approaches the condition through the use of herbs. Ayurveda classifies herbs with a stabilizing effect on the mind as “medhya rasayanas”. These herbs promote the intellect and deeply nourish the neurological tissues. They are nervine tonics. Many such as Ashwaganda and Shankha Pushpi have a secondary mild sedative effect. Others like Calamus have a mild stimulating effect. The most well known herbs for the condition are Brahmi (Bacopa Monierrra) and Gotu Kola (Centella Asiatica). Studies on Bacopa Monierrra performed at Benaras Hindu University in Varanasi, India have revealed beneficial effects on children. Ayurveda favors the use of combinations of herbs that meet the specific needs of the patient as no two patients present exactly the same. Often, additional imbalances, mild or otherwise are present and complicate the condition.

In order to create a “container” for the creative and expansive energies, Ayurveda recommends consistent routines surrounding bed time and meals as well as the overall daily routine. Routines are

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essential to creating stability of the mind. The condition is exacerbated by irregular routines.

In summary, Ayurveda offers the patient with ADD and ADHD an alternative approach to the care of the psyche that respects their individuality and recognizes their gifts as well as their challenges. Care is systemic and holistic and emphasizes maximizing the potential of the patient without suppressing their natural gifts. Complete care includes lifestyle and diet as well as the application of herbs.

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