

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Joseph Baker

ADHD Drug Dangers

Dr. Baker is concerned because a growing number of youngsters are being diagnosed — and misdiagnosed — with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and prescribed medication. Worse yet, some of these youngsters continue to use these drugs into adulthood.

According to information recently released by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), approximately 3 million prescriptions for ADHD drugs are written each year: 1 million for adults and 2 million for children.

Dr. Baker opposes the overuse of ADHD medications for two reasons. First, they mask symptoms linked to ADHD rather than addressing the underlying cause of behavioral and learning problems. Secondly, they have a number of potentially life-threatening side effects: including serious heart problems.

Is It Really ADHD?

In a *USA Today* article, Lawrence Diller, author of “Running on Ritalin” and “Should I Medicate My Child?,” notes that people “often rush to use medications for problems that might be addressed by changing parenting strategies, exploring special education or improving classroom management.”

Dr. Baker notes that ADHD is not a clear-cut diagnosis and should not be accepted prematurely. Children who are highly active may be completely normal. In addition, other conditions, such as sleep disorders or lack of sleep, can mimic ADHD.

A child struggling with emotional issues, such as those stemming from school-related bullying or other forms of abuse, may also exhibit ADHD symptoms. The same goes for creative

and gifted children who find classrooms boring and unchallenging.

Read on to learn about factors that can contribute to ADHD-like symptoms.

Is Sleep an Issue?

Last October, researchers from Denmark reported on a 5-year-old boy with symptoms of attention deficit and social withdrawal. “His sleep was disturbed, with late sleep onset and frequent awakening during the night. After correction of his sleep pattern, the symptoms of attention deficit and social withdrawal disappeared.” (*Ugeskr Laeger* 2005;167:3893-4.)

Another study of 454 elementary-school students found that those who habitually snored had significantly more symptoms of hyperactivity and oppositional defiance (*Child Care Health Dev* 2005;31:707-17).

Ironically, ADHD drugs also up the risk of insomnia (*Pediatrics* 2005;116:777-84).

The Classroom Connection

The notion that one teaching style fits all is archaic. Each child learns differently — even identical twins. One child may learn faster in a more visually stimulating environment, whereas another child may prefer auditory clues.

As a just-released study points out, “students must construct their own understanding of concepts, relationships, and procedures. Teachers can encourage this process by carefully



considering the type and organization of information as well as instructional strategies.” (*Adv Physiol Educ* 2006;30:17-22.)

When teaching and learning styles don’t match, attention problems ensue. For instance, if a child calculates the correct answers on a math quiz but fails because the work was done in his or her head — as opposed to being detailed on paper — that child may act out and stop paying attention in the classroom.

Pressure From Schools

Until recently, teachers and school administrators could legally pressure parents to put children on ADHD medication. But recently passed legislation gives parents the power to protect their children.

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On Dec. 3, 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) became law. "Incorporated within this Act was the first of its kind federal legislation called the 'Prohibition on Mandatory Medication Amendment.' This new law prohibits schools from recommending or requiring that a child take a controlled substance (includes all stimulants: Ritalin, Adderall, Concerta, Dexedrine, Dextrostat, etc.) in order to attend school." (*Parents for a Label and Drug Free Education*, www.ablechild.org)

Parents for a Label and Drug Free Education's President, Patricia Weathers, is an avid supporter of the amendment.

In 1997, Weathers was told that her first-grade son would be placed in special education classes at the Millbrook Elementary School in New York unless he was drugged with Ritalin®.

Reluctantly, the single mother complied — until her son Michael started exhibiting psychotic behavior, including hearing voices in his head. When she stopped the medication two years later, the school filed a medical-neglect and child-abuse complaint against her with the state's Department of Children and Family Services.

"Six months after taking Michael off the drugs, a physical examination showed the boy had a heart murmur," according to an article published in the *New York Post*. Attorney Alan Milstein — in a lawsuit filed against the school on Weathers' behalf — linked the heart murmur to the Ritalin®. The case is still ongoing.

The Dangerous Side Effects of ADHD Drugs

ADHD drugs can have dangerous — even life-threatening — side effects. Following is important information about these troubling side effects.

Powerful Stimulants

Most ADHD drugs belong to a family of drugs called methylphenidate (MPD). What do cocaine, amphetamines, "speed," "uppers" and MPD have in common? A similar structural

configuration and pharmacological profile, according to researchers at the University of Texas Medical School (*Brain Res Bull* 2006;68:393-405).

These same researchers note that repeated treatment with psychostimulants like MPD can lead to dependence, paranoia and schizophrenia. Worse yet, MPD's long-term effect on a child's developing brain has yet to be determined.

Heart Problems

In February, an advisory panel to the FDA suggested adding the agency's strongest "black box" warning label to Ritalin® and related ADHD drugs. Why? Because these drugs may raise a patient's risk of developing heart disease.

The panel based its decision on an FDA report from April 2004 that revealed 51 deaths among patients taking ADHD drugs. Previous reports described incidences of high blood pressure, chest pain, heart attacks, strokes, irregular heartbeats and fainting in conjunction with using these drugs.

Adderall®, an amphetamine-based ADHD drug, already carries a black-box warning stating that misuse of amphetamines may lead to sudden death or serious cardiovascular events. Although Canada issued a six-month ban on the drug last year, Adderall® is once again available within the country's provinces.

Psychological Problems

The link between Ritalin® and psychiatric side effects like agitation, psychosis and depression is well-established, according to a June 29, 2005 story by the *Associated Press*. An FDA report also found that suicidal thoughts, hallucinations and violent behavior are similarly linked to this and other ADHD drugs.

ADHD Drug Abuse

According to the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), methylphenidate drugs have a "high potential for abuse and produce many of the same effects as cocaine or amphetamine. The abuse of this substance has been documented among narcotic addicts."

Research shows that an alarming percentage of students abuse these medications (*J Am Coll Health* 2005;53:167-74).

How Chiropractic Helps

When spinal bones (vertebrae) are misaligned, a common condition known as **vertebral subluxation** can arise. Vertebral subluxations are linked to a host of ailments, including inner ear infections, colic, carpal tunnel syndrome, migraines, back pain and interference with the body's nervous system. It's this connection with the nervous system that may explain why chiropractic appears to help some patients with ADHD.

For instance, one study details that after three years of unsuccessful treatment with an array of ADHD drugs, a 5-year-old patient received 35 sessions of chiropractic care over an eight-week period. Gentle and safe maneuvers, known as **chiropractic adjustments**, were used to realign the youngster's spine.

After just 27 chiropractic visits, the child's pediatrician stated that the patient "no longer exhibited symptoms of ADHD. The changes in structure and function may be related to the correction of cervical kyphosis [curvature of the spine]." (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2004;27:525.)

The child's facial tics were also resolved when chiropractic care replaced Ritalin®.

Take Charge

If your child's school is trying to force you into giving him or her ADHD drugs, or if you are considering them for your child, stand firm and contact our office immediately to schedule an evaluation for him or her.

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