

## **ADD is Not A Ritalin Deficiency**

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Matt Lauer set the bait, Tom Cruise bit on it and now, the use and misuse of Ritalin is back in our conversation. I love sitting back and watching as these events unfold.

Ritalin, Concerta and Adderall, the drugs of choice for managing our youth in the classroom, are classified in the same category as methamphetamines and cocaine. They are stimulant medications; "speed". The well-known and demonstrated effects of amphetamines in their users are a narrowed focus of attention, concentration on detail, and being less in touch with real feelings.

Essentially what happens is that the brain can only respond to so much stimulation. You take an already stimulated child (or adult), give more stimulation via medication and the brain shuts down. It isn't correcting brain chemistry; it is more like a chemical lobotomy. Under the influence of these drugs one becomes more docile, obedient and willing to concentrate on boring, repetitive tasks. These are desirable qualities in today's world, especially in a school setting.

There are many lenses through which view the underlying issue – family dynamics, our mis-expectations of children's behavior, the role TV plays in disrupting our focusing abilities, etc. Here is a view of addressing ADD and ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder) through the lens of nutrition:

*Food allergies* are of first consideration; wheat and dairy the big offenders. Often just removing these from the diet creates a momentous shift. One of my most awesome cases as to the power of diet occurred in changing the life of a rowdy, class disruptive young boy. Removing wheat from his diet created an immediate shift in his ability to focus. He is now attentive, learned to read as a result and only disrupts the class, needing to be taken home, if he has eaten wheat.

*Food additives*, such as MSG and dyes, lurk in processed food under a myriad of names and come with a list of agitating side effects. I refer you to [www.feingold.org](http://www.feingold.org) for furthering your education about the role these play as an underlying cause to many symptoms, not just the ADD phenomenon.

*Blood sugar* must be balanced. The ups and downs as a result of imbalanced meals high in processed carbohydrate choices or in skipping meals can cause any of us to have trouble concentrating. A cereal and juice start to the day just brings trouble. Choose balanced meals of carbohydrate, protein and good quality fats.

*B vitamins* are needed for carbohydrate metabolism, nerve conduction and for being in a good mood. B vitamins, which surround the carbohydrate molecule in

nature, are stripped away in processing of white sugar. The more we eat of white sugar products, the more our bodies are depleted of B vitamins as our body takes from its stores to replenish those needed. Just one soda, very much a part of today's diet, contains 10-12 teaspoons of sugar per can. This not only depletes B vitamins, but disrupts blood sugar balance.

*Calcium* is a relaxing mineral and is depleted in the body with sugar and soda intake. Green leafy vegetables, almonds and sesame seeds are some great non-dairy sources. Staying away from the offending soda and white sugar? A home run in my book.

*Essential Fatty Acids* are needed for optimum brain functioning. Flax Oil or Fish Oil at 1 teaspoon per day for those under 6 years up to 1 Tablespoon for adults is a good recommended dose.

*Fresh air, exercise, plenty of pure water.* Our bodies were created for movement and needs oxygen and water on which to thrive. Often times when these elemental ingredients are missing we can feel discontented and ornery. These must be part of daily self-care, especially for growing bodies.

If you have been following my recent columns you may sense that I keep beating the same drum. I do. Fresh foods, good quality fats, water and body movement can go a long way to cure what ails you, ADD or otherwise.