

DID YOU KNOW?

ADHD, allergies and asthma may be linked. People with asthma are 50% more likely to have ADHD than the average person.

Source: The Lancet Psychiatry



Attention, Please

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) impacts an estimated 8% of U.S. adults and 11% of kids, causing difficulty concentrating, irritability, impulsivity and frenzied behavior. Medication is still the standard of care, but lifestyle tweaks can help ease symptoms. **By Sunny Sea Gold**

CHECK FOR ADDITIVES

"It's been hard for some doctors to believe that food can make a difference in something as difficult to treat as ADHD," says Joel Nigg, Ph.D., a professor of psychiatry at Oregon Health & Science University and author of *Getting Ahead of ADHD*. "But certain additives are associated with more severe symptoms in some people." Artificial colorings (like FD&C Red No. 40 and FD&C Yellow No. 6) appear to be the most problematic. A review of 24 studies conducted by Nigg and his team concluded that the influence of food dyes was small, but significant. Other evidence implicates the preservative sodium benzoate

too. "The evidence does not prove causality, but it's ample reason for concern and caution," adds David Katz, M.D., M.P.H., an *EatingWell* advisory board member. Avoiding these ingredients may not help everyone, but it's worth trying. Nigg says, "Here's my analogy: If a person walks into a room and sneezes, everyone won't catch a cold, but some will. In the same way, additives don't make everyone's symptoms worse, but there's about a 25% chance that eliminating them will have an effect." In addition to reading labels, try generally limiting processed foods. Research supports that an overall healthy diet is linked to lower rates of ADHD in kids.

MOVE YOUR BODY

"There's overwhelming evidence that exercise helps increase attention, mood and brain health overall," says Nigg. Most of the research has been done with children, but a review published in the *Journal of Neural Transmission* found that, in a handful of studies on adults, cardio workouts improved attention and reduced impulsivity. The researchers suggest that exercise may boost brain chemicals—like dopamine and BDNF—that are typically lower in people with ADHD.

SLEEP WELL

More than 80% of adults with ADHD report that they have trouble sleeping, according to a 2017 study. Winding down at night is especially difficult, says sleep specialist and clinical psychologist Michael Breus, Ph.D., so try making your "power-down hour" (his term for the general sleep advice to lower

the lights and do something relaxing before bed) more like 90 minutes. Another strategy: Try a light-therapy lamp. Evidence suggests that using one in the mornings during fall and winter helps adults with ADHD reset their circadian rhythms and feel tired earlier in the evenings. "In many ADHD patients, once a healthy sleep schedule has been established, their symptoms can reduce dramatically," he says.

CONSIDER SUPPLEMENTS

Some experts are excited about "broad-spectrum micronutrients," high-dose combos of minerals and vitamins including niacin, selenium and chromium. A study in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* found that a third of kids taking these supplements saw their attention improve, and a few studies show benefits in adults too. Ask your doctor if this treatment is right for you.