

TAGS: Special Needs; ADHD

Research Suggests that Children with ADHD Benefit From Healthy Lifestyle Choices

A study published [online in the *Journal of Attention Disorders*](#) indicates that children with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) participate in fewer “healthy lifestyle behaviors” than their non-ADHD peers. This finding suggests that they may benefit from improving their lifestyle choices such as increasing water intake, decreasing screen time and getting at least one hour of physical activity per day. The symptoms of ADHD are typically managed with medications, but parents are increasingly concerned about medicating their children and are often looking for alternatives to minimize the symptoms of the disorder.

“Holton and co-author Joel Nigg, of Oregon Health & Science University, looked at whether or not children age 7 to 11 were following key health recommendations for this age range from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Sleep Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Recommendations include getting no more than 1 to 2 hours of total screen time daily; getting at least 1 hour of physical activity daily; limiting consumption of sugar sweetened beverages; getting 9 to 11 hours of sleep per night; and consuming 7 to 10 cups of water daily, depending on age. Holton and Nigg created a lifestyle index to summarize the total number of healthy lifestyle behaviors adhered to by 184 children with ADHD as compared to a control group of 104 non-ADHD youth.”

The study is limited in that it only observed the children’s behaviors at one point in time but the findings suggest that further clinical trial research is necessary to determine the impacts of multiple lifestyle changes on ADHD symptoms. There is the possibility that combining healthy changes could lead to other healthy behaviors.

“For example, physical activity increases thirst, making water consumption more attractive. Physical activity can also offset screen time and can improve sleep. Similarly, removal of caffeinated beverages prevents their diuretic effect, helps increase water consumption, and can help prevent sleep disturbance,” Holton said. “As research into health outcomes in children with ADHD continues to provide new insights, focusing on the overall number of healthy lifestyle behaviors may become important.”

[NACAC has a good overview](#) of the definition and common symptoms of ADHD, including helpful discussions of additional treatment options that might be of interest to you if you suspect that your child has ADHD. There are also good resources listed at their site for further education.