

Osteopathy and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

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ADHD is defined as difficulty in paying attention, memory loss, poor control of impulses, and hyperactivity. It affects boys: girls 2:1 and approximately 5% of children.

Affected children tend to behave poorly, don't sleep much at night and are difficult to control, always seeking attention. It is thought to have an approximately 25% causal relationship to genetic history and 20% to head trauma. Many have no direct aetiology but there may be related conditions such as Fragile X syndrome, and it is sometimes consistent with Tourettes syndrome. The condition may also be due to chemical insult, for instance in the womb due to alcohol or drug abuse, or cigarette smoking. Other factors include lead paint, drugs or medication. Another pathology may cause it such as brain tumour or intracranial bleed. Sometimes it is simply that the child is intelligent and frustrated and bored so becomes overactive and disruptive. And it may be a normal response to a difficult situation such as stress in the home.

Diagnosis is based on case history and observation, then a specific ADHD rating scale in which certain categories need to be met.

Physical examination should be performed in order to exclude any other potential causes for the symptoms.

Conventional treatment is based on a drug regime. One of the most commonly used drugs is Ritalin, but this does have unpleasant side effects such as the feeling of wearing a heavy overcoat. Other side effects of the drugs used include headache, tiredness, and stomach aches. Research suggests that for some children the medication does give benefits (ref below), but for many it is simply a paralysing neutralisation of their personality and a recent study found that over 50% of children prescribed Ritalin for ADHD in America did not have the condition.

There are other treatments such as behavioural therapy, education and support for the family. Children with ADHD benefit from a structural approach with routine and goals.

Cranial osteopathy may be of benefit. As mentioned above there are many different causes for ADHD. Some of the causes will be treatable by the gentle approach which cranial osteopathy affords, and it may make a difference to an ADHD child, particularly if there is a history of a difficult birth or trauma, or heavy medication.. There is no routine approach, treatment will be based on an examination and given in response to any needs identified.

Reference

Developmental Trajectories of Brain Volume Abnormalities in Children and Adolescents With Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 288, no. 14 (October 9,) pp. 1740-1748. F. Xavier Castellanos et al 2002

["The brains of children and adolescents in whom attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is diagnosed are on average 3 percent to 4 percent smaller in volume than those of children without the condition, according to a large-scale government study. And the greater the severity of a child's symptoms, the greater the discrepancy in the size of various brain areas, as measured on brain scans, the researchers said." *The New York Times* (October 9, 2002)]