

Do You Know This Child?

How to Spot Attention Deficits Disorder

by Kathy Gibbons, Ph.D.

Eric's mother Sally finally got Eric to sleep and quietly came out of his room in tears. The day had been a disaster from the start. Eric's teacher had called to say that he had hit another child at school, flunked another spelling test, and told the remedial reading teacher he hated reading and didn't ever want to see her again. It did not get any better after school. At the dinner table Eric threw his spaghetti; Eric's father left the dinner table, saying he couldn't stand this any longer. Eric's pediatrician offered little help: "Boys will be boys..." "He might grow out of it..." "Maybe you ought to reconsider the discipline you use." The school labeled him hyperactive.

There had to be something to do. Sally remembered the family vacation last summer in the mountains, where the air was clear. Eric had caught a bad cold and didn't eat anything. But that week he was a delightful child, even with a cold. Why was Eric so good that week?

This scenario takes place much more often than we would like to think. Every year more and more children are labeled with attention deficits disorder (ADD), attention deficits hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, or learning disability. Some of these children are hyperactive, some quiet and subdued, some irritable, and some frequently sick. Almost all have low self-esteem. Could it be that all of these problems are caused by an environmental overload of chemicals?

Many environmental physicians think that diet and factors in a child's physical environment are in large part the cause for behavioral problems and learning disorders. Dr. Doris Rapp and Dr. William Crook, authors of books on environmental factors in childhood behavioral problems, list a number of symptoms that may indicate the wrong diet or exposure to chemicals and allergens. A child with one or more of these symptoms may benefit from changes in diet, the environment, or both.

Test With Whitefish Allergy Extract

Handwriting Changes In 10 Year Old Stuart Noted After Lunch

Prior to a lunch of whitefish

Stuart

After eating fish

Stuart

After initial test showing reaction to whitefish allergy extract

Stuart

After treatment with the correct dilution of whitefish allergy extract

Stuart

Food allergies can seriously disrupt a child's schoolwork. This child's handwriting returns to normal after allergy treatment. From Dr. Doris J. Rapp's *The Impossible Child*.

- Frequent ear infections
- Frequent use of antibiotics
- Sunken dark circles under the eyes, pallor
- Stuffy nose, asthma, sinus infections
- Skin rashes, red cheeks, red ears, eczema
- Headache, muscle aches
- Digestive problems: diarrhea, constipation, gas, stomachaches
- Mood swings, irritability, depression, aggressive behavior
- Difficulty in sleeping: too much, too little, fitful
- Bed wetting, difficult to potty train
- Overactive, "spaced out," fatigue

- Short attention span, inability to concentrate
- Excessive perspiration

If you suspect that your child may be suffering from food allergies, first consider the foods your child is eating. According to Dr. William Crook, author of *Tracking your Child's Hidden Food Allergies*, the foods that most often cause physical and behavioral problems are food dyes, sugar, milk, corn, chocolate, eggs, wheat, and peanuts. Pay special attention to any food that your child craves and "cannot do without." People are often highly allergic to foods that they crave.

Food allergies are unpredictable; reactions can be immediate or delayed, and traditional allergy tests cannot always detect them. If food allergies are a problem, a few days on a diet that eliminates allergy-causing foods will produce a tremendous improvement. That improvement has given many parents the motivation to continue.

In some cases it is necessary to consider inhalant allergies. Allergies to molds, pollens and chemicals can significantly affect behavior and learning. Dr. Doris Rapp has videotapes of children's behavior before and after being given various inhalant extracts. The tapes show the unacceptable behavior and inability to cope that these children suffer from when exposed to these substances. When these tapes were shown on the Phil Donahue show, many parents suddenly realized, "Yes, that is my child!" The Donahue show received more calls about this show than any they have ever done, and continue to get calls to this day.

I have seen a child with an illness diagnosed by psychiatrists as "classic childhood depression" recover with treatment for mold allergies. I have seen another child moved from the special education classroom into an honors program by eliminating offending chemicals and animal dander.

Hyperactive and learning-disabled children are often treated with drugs such as Ritalin and Cylert. Dr. Crook, in *Help for the Hyperactive Child*, observes that the long-term prognosis for children treated only with drugs is very poor. Although environmental physicians do not have all of the answers, most agree that children should first undergo a thorough investigation into allergic sensitivities before resorting to drugs. Many of the emotional and physical symptoms conventionally associated with hyperactivity and learning disabilities are in fact the result of an allergic reaction to foods, inhalants, or chemicals.

Dr. Crook, Dr. Rapp, and many other environmental physicians believe that at least 75 percent of ADD children can function well in school, at home, and in the community without drugs. All that they need is dietary and environmental modification. If you have a child with these problems, environmental medicine is worth a try. It really could change your child's life.

Kathy Gibbons has a Ph.D. in biochemistry. She lives in Colorado with her husband and two children. Her column on environmental health appears in every issue.

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Resources

Publications

Help for the Hyperactive Child: A Good-Sense Guide for Parents of Children with Hyperactivity, Attention Deficits, and Other Behavior and Learning Problems, and Tracking your Child's Hidden Food Allergies, by William G. Crook, M.D., Professional Books, 1978.

Is This Your Child? Discovering and Treating Unrecognized Allergies, by Doris Rapp, M.D., William Morrow and Company, 1991.

"The Little Boy Who Became a Jekyll-and-Hyde," by Stanley L. Englehardt, Reader's Digest, March 1981.

Resources for Finding a Doctor in Your Area

American Academy of Environmental Medicine, PO Box 16106, Denver, CO 80216; 303/622-9755.

International Health Foundation, Inc., 681 Skyline Drive, Jackson, TN 38301; 901/427-8100.

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