

Developmental Disorders and Essential Fatty Acids

Research suggests that there is a series of related conditions (dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and dyspraxia) which can overlap, so an affected child is likely to display a combination of problems. Some children have only one of these disorders but many have two or all three leading to problems that are extremely distressing both for the child and his or her parents. Such problems often lead to disruptive behavior and school failure.

Striking results from a major ongoing research program on Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) show that lipid supplementation can make a child less clumsy and more able to catch a ball within 12 weeks.

Children do not "outgrow" deficiencies of EFAs---they manifest those deficiencies as psychiatric symptoms in adulthood mostly as mood disorders (anxiety and depression).

This worldwide research indicates that supplementation with fish oil high in docosahexaenoic acid offers hope to those with dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD.

Signs of fatty acid deficiencies

In Infants

- Extreme restlessness, crying, poor sleep patterns
- Difficulties in feeding
- Constant thirst
- Frequent tantrums, head banging and rocks the cot

In Older Children

- Physical and mental restlessness
- Poor concentration and brief attention span
- Increased activity - always on the go
- Impulsive - doesn't stop to think
- Fearless, takes undue risks
- Easily distracted
- Has difficulty doing tasks alone
- Often interrupts others
- Loses things and forgets to do things
- Poor co-ordination - when tying laces, handwriting, ball games
- Weak short term memory
- Inflexible personality - uncooperative, defiant and disobedient
- Problems with making friends
- Lack of self esteem
- Sleep & appetite problems continue
- Normal or high IQ but under-performance at school 'Hot' or explosive temper
- Unpredictable behavior

Research has shown:

- Hyperactivity may be due to a deficiency of EFAs.
- Low levels of EFAs are common in the blood of children with asthma and allergies. It is known that many hyperactive children suffer from colic, eczema, asthma, allergies and repeated infections.
- Zinc deficiency leads to poor EFA processing in the body. Hair analysis has indicated that many hyperactive children are zinc deficient.
- Salicylates block conversion of EFAs to Prostaglandins - EFAs and prostaglandins are important in brain function. Some food additives and natural food ingredients like salicylates can cause rapid deterioration in a hyperactive child's behaviour.
- The problem is unlikely to be due to lack of EFAs in the diet since often only one family member may be affected.
- The most likely cause of the problem is a failure to convert dietary EFAs to long chain EFAs the ones needed by body processes and especially by the brain)

"One of the most important skills that children and adults with ADHD must learn is how to properly feed their own brains for life" (Lyon, p121).

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