

ADHD Quick Facts

Complementary Interventions for ADHD

Parents often look for interventions that will work together with—or even in place of—the recommended treatments for ADHD. ADHD treatments that are supported by solid research include medication, behavioral treatments such as [behavior management strategies](#), [parent training](#), and school programs that include accommodations.

Interventions that are complementary to recommended treatments include dietary approaches, nutritional supplements, mind/body practices (exercise, yoga, meditation), or brain-training programs. Before selecting a complementary intervention, consider:

- Were clinical trials done to prove this intervention works? (A clinical trial is a scientific evaluation of a new treatment.)
- Can I find information about this intervention from a trusted source?
- How much effort and cost are involved, and how does that compare to what we know about the benefits?
- Will my health insurance cover this intervention? (Insurance generally will not cover unproven interventions.)

Dietary interventions and nutritional supplements

Eating a [healthy, balanced diet](#) made up of whole foods and minimally [processed foods](#) is key to a healthy mind and body for everyone. Some studies suggest that artificial food dyes and preservatives could make ADHD symptoms worse in some children. Eliminating all [food dyes](#) and preservatives can be challenging, but if you think your child is sensitive to them, talk with your doctor about changing their diet.

ADHD medication can also interfere with appetite, so talk with your doctor about how to make sure your child gets the right nutrition if you are concerned.

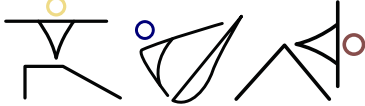


There have been some encouraging studies on [micronutrient supplements](#) (including zinc, iron, magnesium, vitamin B, vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acids) for improving ADHD symptoms. More studies are needed before they can be considered evidence-based treatment. Talk with your child's doctor to find out if your child has a micronutrient deficiency that can be addressed through diet. Your child's doctor can guide you on supplementation if needed.

[Herbal supplements](#) such as pycnogenol (French maritime pine bark), ginkgo biloba, and St. John's wort, along with other natural products including caffeine, ginseng, valerian, ningdong, bacopa, and passion flower have also been tried for ADHD. There is not enough evidence that these herbs and supplements decrease ADHD symptoms, however. Remember that herbs, when they work, are crude drugs, and "natural" does not mean "safe."

Mind and body practices

Exercise has been shown in some [studies](#) to reduce ADHD symptoms for a limited time. It is also recommended for everyone's [general health](#) and well-being.



A lack of [sleep](#) can look like ADHD symptoms or worsen ADHD symptoms. Researchers have also noted the benefits of a consistent bedtime routine for children. Getting enough sleep and rest can improve attention and executive functioning. It is important for all children, but particularly for those who have to struggle with ADHD symptoms. ADHD medication can interfere with sleep, so talk with your doctor if you have concerns.

Some research studies indicate that [mindfulness](#), yoga, and meditation can improve symptoms, executive functioning, and parent-child relationships. More research needs to be done on these practices.



A few studies show limited [evidence for acupuncture's](#) effectiveness for ADHD symptoms. Studies of [homeopathic](#) preparations indicate no significant improvements of ADHD symptoms.

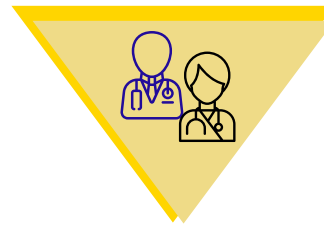
Brain training interventions

Neurofeedback aims to decrease ADHD symptoms by teaching people to change their brain wave patterns. It is labor-intensive and expensive. [Research studies](#) that are not blinded—where study participants know which intervention they are receiving—report neurofeedback to be helpful for ADHD symptoms, but no well-blinded randomized trial has shown significant benefit for ADHD.

Numerous other brain training programs and apps claim to improve memory and attention. Although one may find personal testimonials that they work, there is not a lot of [good research](#) on these types of products.

Talk with your child's doctor first

Before choosing a complementary treatment, talk to your child's doctor. Keep in mind that vitamins and minerals, and especially herbs, can interact with medications. Discuss everything you do to address ADHD symptoms with your child's doctor.



Take action now

Some of the things mentioned here have little to no risks, minimal expense, and doctors recommend them for all children. Dealing with ADHD symptoms can be stressful, and having a healthier body and mind can help your child [manage their ADHD](#). You can take action today by working to help your child eat a healthy diet, have sufficient exercise, and follow a consistent sleep routine at home.



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