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ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER: AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is characterized by inattention, hyperactivity and impulsive behavior. ADD falls under the heading of Unmada in Ayurvedic Texts, which is a general heading for Mania's, or in this case a type of minimal brain disorder. In the case of all the described causes of ADD, the underlying factor is a deficiency of Prana, or Energy, in the body. ADD, however, is a minor disorder classified by no known Neurochemical imbalances to date and can be successfully treated with a comprehensive Ayurvedic regime. The Ayurvedic treatment with special reference to Panchakarma procedures followed by administration of Rasayana, Rasayana group of Herbo-Mineral or Gold based Medicine, Yogic support have shown definite protective influence.

KEY WORDS: Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Ayurveda, Hyperactivity, Prana, Panchakarma Rasayana

INTRODUCTION

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Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is classified by three symptomatic characteristics: inattention, hyperactivity and impulsive behavior. In recent years much research has gone into identifying the cause of ADD. Thorough investigations have gone into lifestyle,

sugar intake, excessive TV watching, and even chemical toxicity during pregnancy, an occurrence once thought to be the cause of minimal brain disorders or ADD¹. In all the research only a small and insignificant percentage of cases with ADD proved positive for such causative factors. To date, these factors remain neither proven nor disproved.

In Ayurveda, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or hyperactivity falls under the heading of Unmada, which is a general heading for Mania's, or in this case a type of minimal brain disorder. The definition given by Charaka², states that Unmada is a wandering of mind, intellect, consciousness, knowledge, memory, inclination, manners, activities, and conduct.³ It also describes five possible causes for this condition: Vata, Pitta, Kapha, and Sannipata (the aggravation of all three Doshas)⁴ and exogenous factors (genetic or outside factors).⁵ We must remember that many of our modern diseases did not exist as such in the past, therefore an exact differential diagnosis may not be drawn or quoted from the original texts. I do believe, however, that the texts will describe the underlying

factors that would elicit the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). The Western classification of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is by three consistent symptoms. Each of these symptoms specifically relate to one of the three Doshas when out of balance⁶.

Inattention – when the individual is unable to focus on any one thing for a length of time, is primarily a Kapha symptom. The mind seems dull and lethargic unless it is accompanied by physical or kinetic activity. Imbalances are an accumulation of the Doshas too much; Kapha creates depressed mental activities, or inattention. However, excessive Vata create inattention and/or hyperactivity⁷.

Hyperactivity – This symptom is a classic depiction of a Vata imbalance. The mind is restless and racing, legs and feet cannot be still. It seems impossible for the mind or body to settle down and relax and/or focus.⁸

Compulsive Behavior – these symptoms of action without thought are typically controlled by pitta. Students will blurt out answers, jump up in class and show little ability to think through or control their actions.⁹

Although everyone at times will seem either a bit compulsive, hyperactive, or unable to keep their mind on their work, this disorder is classically a combination of all three imbalances at the same time – known as sannipata¹⁰. Because all three Doshas are out of balance simultaneously, Sannipata becomes a chronic condition and more difficult to treat. In extreme cases the disorder of Sannipata is said to be incurable. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), however, is a minor neurochemical imbalance to date and can be successfully treated with a comprehensive Ayurvedic Regime¹¹.

The final categories of causes mentioned by Charaka are the exogenous factors¹². These factors translate Ayurveda to Genetic susceptibilities, and the factors that can exacerbate genetic weaknesses are many. Each individual body type may be triggered into an Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) response by a variety of the previously mentioned factors (TV, sugar, lifestyle, and toxicity).¹³

There will probably not be one cause for every case of ADD. Each individual must be treated as an individual and offered a unique and tailored package of therapies for his or her condition. One factor that has been overlooked by researchers when looking into dietary factors is the ingestion of growth hormones. Growth hormones are

stimulants injected into animals to increase growth rates, and there have not been any long-term studies on the effects and use of this hormones.¹⁴ However, in vegetarian societies such as India, ADD is relatively unknown. In America, where the diet includes large amounts of red meats, poultry, and milk, ADD has become prevalent¹⁵. The consumption of hormone-free meats, eggs, and milk, or a vegetarian diet, should be examined as potential treatment and prevention.¹⁶

In the case of all the above described causes of Attention Deficit Disorder, the underlying factor is a deficiency of Prana, or Energy, in the body. This may not seem the case as kids are jumping off walls and displaying hyperkinetic behavior. It appears that they have too much energy and need to be settled down¹⁶. In Ayurveda this apparent excess in energy is caused by a lack of Prana (energy that controls vata) which must be sufficient to naturally calm the nervous system. Without sufficient prana, the nervous system can run out of control and lead to Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) symptoms.¹⁷ A similar phenomenon is seen with insomnia, a symptom of Prana depletion. Insomniacs actually need more energy or Prana to settle their own nervous system.¹⁸ A sedative could actually further deplete the patient. Ritalin, the common Western drug

for ADD, is a stimulant drug that seems to work well for the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder, possibly for the same reasons.¹⁹

General Treatment

In a situation when all three Doshas seem to be out of balance and the symptoms indicate that a lack of Prana vata is present, the treatment protocol should be strengthening and building.²⁰

- Remove all chemicals and preservatives from the diet.
- Eat organic meat and foods whenever possible.
- Incorporate the following formulas:

Formula for Nervous System Dysfunction and Depletion:

Soak three unpeeled almonds overnight in a glass of water with one whole black pepper and one teaspoon fennel seeds. In the morning, remove the skins from the almonds and crush all three ingredients into a paste & add equal parts sweet butter and honey to taste. Take this first thing in the morning on an empty stomach and do not eat for 1 1/2 hours afterwards. Continue every morning for 15 days.²¹

Formula to Rejuvenate and Detoxify the Nervous System through Synergistic, Free Radical Scavenging Effects:

Equal parts of Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) & Guduchi (*tinospora cordifolia*) in powder

form. Take 1 teaspoon of the combination 2 times a day with hot water or with ghee and honey to make a paste.²²

Formula to Strengthen and Calm the Nervous System (Tonic)

Equal parts of Jatamansi (*Nordostycus jatamansi*), Shankpushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*), and Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*) in powder form. Take 1/2 teaspoon of the combination after meals three times in a day Vacha (*Acorus calamus*) Churna can also be added to this combination if easily tolerated by the patient.²³

Meditation

Meditation is probably one of the most important self-help techniques employable in the treatment Attention Deficit Disorder. Meditation will accustom the mind to being calm. In time, the individual will begin to take this calm into all activity, and will replace stress-induced hyperactivity with -composure.²⁴

Pranayama

Specifically, Chandra Bhedna, or the cooling and calming breath, is indicated for ADD. All pranayama techniques will move Prana or energy.²⁵ Chandra Bhedna will both increase the availability of Prana and provide a neurological calm needed by the body.²⁶ To perform Pranayama, inhale deeply, to your capacity, through the left nostril with the right nostril closed, then exhale as slow as possible through the

right nostril with the left nostril closed. Repeat this for a minimum of 10 breaths and gradually increase to a maximum of 5 minutes.

Panchakarma

Panchakarma is a very powerful seasonal detoxification and rejuvenating process that can be extremely useful in the treatment of ADD. It provides not only a cleansing on a cellular level but also deep calm and subsequent access to one's own being or consciousness. Once this experience of being is accessed and infused into every cell in the body, the body can heal. The vedic concept of Pragyapradh, "the mistake of the intellect", wherein the intellect forgets its true reality as a field of consciousness and love, is credited as the cause of all disease. Ayurveda is dedicated to the restoration of this reality.²⁷

Abhayanga

Abhayanga, Ayurvedic massage, begins this treatment for the first 40 minutes. This is followed by Swedana, an herbal steam (using Dashamula, or "ten roots decoction"), which one performs for 20 minutes.²⁸ Shirodhara, in which body-temperature oil is poured over the forehead for 20 minutes concludes the session. This is repeated for seven days²⁹

Basti

Basti is an Herbal enema, made with Bala (Sida cordifolia), Vacha (Acorus calamus),

and Haritaki (Terminalia chebula) boiled down from four cups of water to 1 cup. Add 1 cup of sesame oil and administer each night for seven nights.³⁰

Nasya with Brahmi Ghee (adapted for home use)

Massage the head and neck, then take a hot shower. Following this, steam the face and neck by using the following method: fill a large bowl with freshly boiled water. Add 1-2 drops Eucalyptus oil or Vicks Vaporub. Take a clean, large towel and drape it over the head to make a tent. Lean over the bowl so that the steam is trapped inside the towel tent. Inhale the steam for two to three minutes. Gently apply hot towels to the neck and face. After steam inhalation follow instructions below to sniff Brahmi Ghee³¹.

Using an eye dropper, place two or three drops of Brahmi Ghee (see recipe below) directly into both nostrils. Sniff the oil into the sinus cavity. Hold both nostrils closed, then breathe in through the nose while rapidly closing and opening the nostrils. Repeat the sniffing procedure three times³².

An alternate lubrication method: Place a few drops of the oil in the palm of the left hand. Dip the little finger of the right hand into the oil. Insert the oiled finger into both nostrils until they are well lubricated. If you use this method, make sure that your hands are clean and that the nail of your

little finger is clipped short. Continue with the sniffing procedure described above. Repeat as needed. Do not perform within two hours of bedtime.³³

Brahmi Ghee Recipe

Boil 3 teaspoons of Brahmi (powder, leaves, or crushed tablets) in one cup of

water for 5 minutes. Strain the liquid through a cotton cloth. Add a cup of ghee to the remaining liquid and boil this mixture until the water is evaporated (approximately 15 minutes). Take care that the Brahmi-Ghee doesn't burn once the water is evaporated.³⁴

CONCLUSION

The absence of specific treatment for Attention Deficit Disorder makes it all the more important to consider complementary and alternative approaches of treatment. The Ayurvedic treatment with special reference to Panchakarma procedures followed by administration of Rasayana

group (Herbal/Herbo-mineral), Gold based medicine and Yogic support have shown definite protective influence. Unique approach provides not only a cleansing on a cellular level but also deep calm and subsequent access to one's own being or consciousness.

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