Dietary Treatment for Hyperactive Children

J. Breakey, M. Hill, C. Reilly, H. Connell
Journal of the American Dietetic Association
Vol. 92, No. 5, May 1992

Results of this study suggest that a low-additive, low-salicylate diet has a place in the treatment of children with behavior and learning problems. Dietary factors should be considered as aggravating the underlying predispositions in susceptible children rather than as causing hyperactivity; a positive outcome from dietary intervention is one of degree. A group of 516 children (mean age = 7.8 years) received a low-additive, low-salicylate diet as part of long term management. A positive response was obtained in 79.5% of the children. A normal range of behavior was achieved in 54.5% of the 25% in whom diet therapy was necessary but not sufficient; half also required stimulant medication. Almost 50% of the participants limited or excluded other foods, particularly chocolate, milk, and wheat. An age effect was evident – more responders were in the under-9 group. The likelihood of a positive outcome was higher if there was a family history of allergy or intolerance to any food. The concept of being a “diet detective” stimulated an inquiring attitude in the children using diet therapy for self-management.