

ADHD EDUCATION



A COMBINATION OF MEDICATION & BEHAVIOURAL APPROACHES MAY BE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN MEDICATION ALONE.



MANAGING ADHD >

IMPORTANCE OF BEHAVIOURAL & LIFESTYLE INTERVENTIONS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ADHD

Psychoiatric disorders tend to be complex. They have many different factors contributing to their development, and therefore have different aspects to their management as well. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is no different. Correct use of medication is very important in controlling symptoms, but this is not the only thing that people with ADHD can do to improve their functioning and quality of life. Some research suggests that using a combination of medication and behavioural approaches may be more effective than medication alone **(1)**.

The term "behavioural interventions" refers to strategies that aim to increase useful behaviours and reduce or eliminate harmful behaviours, or those that interfere with learning. This includes very structured types of therapies (such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and psychosocial therapy **(2)**), but also includes working with parents and schools to develop behavioural contingency plans, motivational enhancement, and academic, organizational and social skills training **(3)**. The aim of these strategies is not to cure the condition, but rather to assist the child with ADHD to develop skills that will benefit them in the short-term and later in life. They can assist your child with gaining confidence and learning social skills that can improve their quality of life.

An important concept in the use of behavioural therapies for children with ADHD is that sometimes it is not only the child whose behaviour needs to be modified. Coping with the stress of raising a child with ADHD can be challenging and often the way that a parent interacts with a disruptive child can make the situation worse. One of the behavioural strategies used, called Behavioural Parent Therapy (BPT), aims to address this. BPT can assist you to learn skills that can improve your home life and your relationship with your child. Some of the skills that can be learned are **(4)**:

- **Setting up a routine and creating effective house rules**
- **Noticing and rewarding good behaviour and ignoring or appropriately punishing negative behaviour**
- **Giving your child specific directions, rather than general ones which could cause confusion**
- **Helping your child feel less overwhelmed by breaking down big tasks into small, achievable goals**
- **Creating an organised home and minimising distractions**

Research has shown that BPT can have a moderate to substantial improvement for children with a variety of disruptive behaviour problems. Speak to your doctor about finding a BPT program if you think this may be right for you.

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SOURCES >

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In addition to behavioural therapies, addressing certain lifestyle habits may also help your child to cope better. With regards to diet, try to plan regular meals and do not skip meals. This is important for children on medication because it can lead to appetite suppression and weight loss (5). However, it is also helpful in children who are not on medication because it helps to avoid drops in blood sugar which can negatively affect mood. You may have been exposed to some suggestions about supplements or specific diets that will help with symptoms, such as supplementation with polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA) or avoidance of artificial food colourants (AFC). There is still some controversy over how effective these interventions are (6,7). The use of a restricted few food diet (FFD) has more support from research (8,9) but can be difficult to implement practically. This diet eliminates foods that may be worsening symptoms and restricts the diet to a small number of foods. The goal is to identify "triggering" foods for a specific individual over time, by a process of provocation and elimination. It can be a long process and should only be done under supervision from a professional.

