

# Sugar & ADHD: Does Sugar Make ADHD Symptoms Worse?

Sugar is a well-known and prevalent ingredient that has found its way into many of the food and drinks we consume. Unfortunately, the prevalence of sugar can have some negative effects. Sugar is both toxic and addictive. The sugar in candy, soft drinks, and fruit juices can cause dysregulation in the brain. Specifically, sugar stimulates dopamine in the brain, as well as opioid receptors, which causes cravings for it.

For those with ADHD, sugar intake should be monitored closely since it can make ADHD symptoms worse. In fact, ADHD and sugar consumption has been studied to determine just how they interact. In this article, we'll look at just how sugar affects ADHD, if sugar causes ADHD, and how to approach ADHD sugar consumption.

Maintaining a healthy diet is crucial for getting essential nutrients to the brain to optimize functioning. It's especially important for those with brain-based conditions like ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorders. To learn more about what foods to eat and avoid, have a look at the Drake Institute's recommended diet plan for kids with ADHD (</adhd-diet-plans-for-kids>).

The Drake Institute uses non-invasive, drug-free treatment protocols for ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and other conditions like anxiety, depression, insomnia, and more. For over 40 years, the Institute has helped patients reduce and/or resolve their symptoms and improve their quality of life.

To learn more about the technologies we use and how they help kids, teens, and adults with ADHD, call us at 800-700-4233 or fill out the contact form.

## Free Consultation - Telehealth Consultation Available

If you or a family member need help, please fill out our confidential online form

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## What Is ADHD?

ADHD, or Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, is a common condition that affects the brain's ability to concentrate on a non-preferred task. In about half of patients, it also makes it difficult to self-regulate their behavior. It is most often diagnosed in children, though teens and adults can also have it. It is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulties focusing, paying attention, controlling impulsive behaviors, and more.

ADHD often negatively affects nearly every part of daily life, including interactions with peers, academics, work-life, and daily living activities. Without proper treatment, the challenges of living with ADHD can lead to negative outcomes and unfulfilled potential.

According to the CDC

(<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/data.html#:~:text=Millions%20of%20US%20children%20have,children%20aged%206%E2%80%99>)

it is estimated that 9.4% of American children have ever been diagnosed with ADHD, making it one of the most common brain-based disorders in the US.

## Symptoms of ADHD

Though it's expected for children to have a hard time sitting still for a long period, many kids with ADHD will struggle more than their peers. They may lack organizational skills or behavioral control typical for their age, which can lead to problems at school and with friends. ADHD can also disrupt family relations and put more pressure on marriages.

ADHD may present differently in different patients. Some may experience symptoms more closely related to inattention, while others may suffer from hyperactivity and impulsivity more prominently. Still, others may experience a combination. Below are the most common symptoms for each type of ADHD.

ADHD: (Inattentive presentation)

- Inattention
- Easily distracted
- Lack of sustained focus on non-preferred tasks

## Media Recognition



- Difficulty finishing tasks such as homework without supervision
- Poor short-term memory, like difficulty following a series of instructions
- Often forgetful, such as forgetting to do or turn in homework
- Poor listening skills



#### ADHD: (Hyperactive-impulsive presentation)



- Impulsive (acting without thinking of the consequences, blurting out answers, experiencing difficulty waiting for one's turn)
- Hyperactive (fidgety and/or difficulty sitting still)
- Interrupts others
- Inability to play quietly

#### ADHD: (Combined presentation)

- Inattentive symptoms along with hyperactivity/impulsivity

#### ADHD: (Unspecified ADHD)

- Significant clinical impairment but does not meet full criteria of ADHD symptoms

To be diagnosed as having ADHD, two additional conditions must

also be met:

1. Symptoms must occur more frequently or severely when compared to trained clinicians, you can get the help you need from the comfort of your home. **Learn More >>** (/remote-neurofeedback-treatment)
- Symptoms must reduce the quality of functioning in one's life, such as interfering with social, academic and/or occupational functioning



**Drake Institute**  
of Neurophysical Medicine  
What Causes ADHD?  
Improving People's Lives Since 1980



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800-700-4233

(tel: +1-800-700-4233)

(https://www.facebook.com/DrakeInstitute/)(https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKyjSa4XhcdzjCJtZcg\_UA)(https://www.instagram.com/thedrakeinstitute/)

The inattention and hyperactivity resulting from ADHD are caused

by dysregulation within the brain, most often involving the frontal region. This area is responsible for attention and focus.

It may seem like a child with ADHD is simply acting out or intentionally choosing not to pay attention. Indeed, these children may be seen as lazy, unmotivated, or ill-tempered. In reality, their brain simply isn't allowing them to meet age-appropriate demands due to dysregulation in the brain. Effort, discipline, and parental strictness aren't enough to normalize that dysregulation.

## How Does Sugar Affect Children With ADHD?

Sugar and ADHD are a poor combination. Sugar causes a release of dopamine in the brain similar to stimulant drugs. Even children without ADHD can become fidgety and inattentive after ingesting sugar. For children with ADHD, sugar can further disrupt an already dysregulated brain.

Sugar can also have a negative impact on the gut. Children with ADHD may already have gastrointestinal symptoms, and sugar could make them worse. Essentially, sugar affects ADHD by increasing brain dysregulation which exacerbates symptoms. It will also cause a spike in blood sugar, which then results in a spike in insulin and soon thereafter you can experience hypoglycemia, which makes inattention worse. For children with ADHD, a sugar crash can be particularly disruptive when they're in the classroom. So if a child ingests a sugary breakfast then they may crash in the classroom mid-morning.

ADD & ADHD

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Sugar does indeed affect children with ADHD, but does sugar cause ADHD? There have been no studies to indicate that sugar consumption causes ADHD.

## What About Artificial Sweeteners?

When it comes to ADHD sugar intake and ADHD sugar addiction, it's important to pay attention to artificial sweeteners as well. Some sweeteners, like Aspartame and Saccharine, are known to affect some individuals negatively and could lead kids with ADHD to have headaches or learning problems. Artificial sweeteners can make ADHD and sugar cravings worse. Artificial colorings and flavorings can also disrupt brain functioning. In Europe, there are warning labels on foods containing artificial colorings and flavorings.

Instead of substituting sugar with artificial sweeteners, try avoiding processed sweet foods altogether.

## Ingredients To Watch Out For

It may seem easy to identify sugar as an ingredient in packaged or prepared foods, but it's not the only thing you have to look out for. Several ingredients serve as "code words" for sugar, making avoiding it more challenging. Here are some of the most common ingredients that are essentially the same as sugar in how it interacts with the brain.

- Corn sweetener
- Corn syrup
- Corn syrup solids
- Dehydrated cane juice
- Dextrin
- Dextrose
- Maltodextrin
- Molasses
- Rice syrup
- Sucrose
- Agave

## ADHD & Sugar Addiction

Sugar in the quantity we see now is a relatively new addition to the human diet. Previously, sugar was ingested in its natural form, through fruits and vegetables. Modern refined sugars like those listed above are now found in many foods, even those that aren't "sweet."

This change in diet has affected what we eat and the foods we crave. Sugar has been studied extensively and is a highly addictive substance. Indeed, one study performed on rats revealed that sugar was even more addictive than cocaine. The study indicates that sugar generates an abnormally intense reward signal in the brain and can even "override self-control mechanisms," leading to addiction.

Whether or not ADHD children are more prone to becoming addicted to sugar than their neurotypical peers is inconclusive. However, ADHD sugar intake should be monitored and minimized

since it can worsen symptoms.

## Best Diet Plan For ADHD Children

A balanced and nutritional diet is important for the brain to function optimally. It's even more important for children with ADHD, who are already being affected by brain dysregulation. The best diet plan for ADHD children will be similar to any other diet plan aiming for optimum health. We recommend something like the Mediterranean diet.

Because of how sugar affects ADHD children, it's best to avoid it as much as possible, especially in processed foods. Maintaining consistent blood sugar levels will help with stability and performance.

There should also be an emphasis on vitamins and minerals. Below are a few that are particularly useful in maintaining brain health.

- Foods rich in zinc (spinach, beef, lamb, oysters, mushrooms, pork, chicken)
- Foods rich in iron (beans, lentils, peas, chickpeas, sesame seeds)
- Foods rich in magnesium (fish, brown rice, avocados, dried fruits, bananas)
- Foods / Supplements rich in omega-3 fatty acids (cold-water fish, cod liver oil, flaxseed, and chia seeds)

For more detailed information on monitoring ADHD and blood sugar and what foods to eat and avoid with ADHD, check out the Drake Institute's full ADHD diet recommendations ([/adhd-diet-plans-for-kids](#)).

## How The Drake Institute Treats ADHD

Understanding how sugar affects ADHD is a good step in helping any child improve their ADHD symptoms. To optimize ADHD treatment improvement, we recommend eating a healthy diet with as little sugar as possible to support our customized brain map-guided neurofeedback treatment protocols. At the Drake Institute, these protocols are derived from the patient's abnormal brain wave patterns linked to their symptoms.

The Drake Institute uses advanced treatment technologies, including brain mapping and neurofeedback, to treat various medical conditions, including stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia, PTSD, Autism Spectrum Disorders, ADHD, and more.

### Brain Mapping

Brain mapping, also called qEEG brain mapping, is the first step in our treatment for brain-based disorders like ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorders. The patient's brainwave activity is measured and recorded using specialized sensors and advanced technology. The data is then sent through an FDA-registered normative database of asymptomatic, same-age individuals.

The comparison to more "typical" brainwave patterns helps our Medical Director identify areas of the brain that may be experiencing dysregulation contributing to symptoms. Once the areas have been identified, a treatment protocol is designed for the patient.

## Neurofeedback

After the brain has been mapped out, the patient undergoes neurofeedback treatment/training. During this stage of treatment, the sensors are again placed on the patient's scalp, where they record the brainwave activity.

This recorded brainwave activity is displayed on a screen in a form that is easy to understand, like a video game. During treatment sessions, the patient "plays" the video game by guiding their own brainwaves towards healthier functional patterns.

Neurofeedback treatment at the Drake Institute is drug-free and non-invasive, making it a safe and effective treatment choice for adults, teenagers, and children with ADHD.

## Contact The Drake Institute Today!

If your child or an adult family member has been diagnosed with ADHD or has been displaying ADHD symptoms, find out how the Drake Institute can help. Just call us at 800-700-4233 or fill out the free consultation form.

## Contact Us Today

To get the help you or a loved one needs, call now to schedule your no-cost screening consultation.

📞 800-700-4233 (tel:+1-800-700-4233)

Free Consultation

★★★★★

9/10/2015

"I was hesitant to go to The Drake Institute but was at a loss on how to help my son. I can not thank Drake and Maria enough I don't think we would be where we are today without it."

🌟 yelp



"David F. Velkoff, M.D., our Medical Director and co-founder, supervises all evaluation procedures and treatment programs. He is recognized as a physician pioneer in using biofeedback, qEEG brain mapping, neurofeedback, and neuromodulation in the treatment of ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and stress related illnesses including anxiety, depression, insomnia, and high blood pressure. Dr. David Velkoff earned his

Master's degree in Psychology from the California State University at Los Angeles in 1975, and his Doctor of Medicine degree from Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta in 1976. This was followed by Dr. Velkoff completing his internship in Obstetrics and Gynecology with an elective in Neurology at the University of California Medical Center in Irvine. He then shifted his specialty to Neurophysical Medicine and received his initial training in biofeedback/neurofeedback in Neurophysical Medicine from the leading doctors in the world in biofeedback at the renown Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas. In 1980, he co-founded the Drake Institute of Neurophysical Medicine. Seeking to better understand the link between illness and the mind, Dr. Velkoff served as the clinical director of an international research study on psychoneuroimmunology with the UCLA School of Medicine, Department of Microbiology and Immunology, and the Pasteur Institute in Paris. This was a follow-up study to an earlier clinical collaborative effort with UCLA School of Medicine demonstrating how the Drake Institute's stress treatment resulted in improved immune functioning of natural killer cell activity. Dr. Velkoff served as one of the founding associate editors of the scientific publication, Journal of Neurotherapy. He has been an invited guest lecturer at Los Angeles Children's Hospital, UCLA, Cedars Sinai Medical Center-Thalians Mental Health Center, St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica, California, and CHADD. He has been a medical consultant in Neurophysical Medicine to CNN, National Geographic Channel, Discovery Channel, Univision, and PBS."

More About What Makes Drake Institute Unique (/the-uniqueness-of-the-drake-institute)

## Irvine Clinic

Stonecreek Plaza

4330 Barranca Parkway ste 130

Irvine, CA 92604

949-653-2020

(tel:+1@root.location1Phone)

Office Hours:

Monday-Thursday 9:00 AM – 8:00 PM

Friday 9:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Saturday 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

## West Los Angeles Clinic

11111 W Olympic Blvd. ste 210

Los Angeles 90064

310-208-2020

(tel:+1@root.location2Phone)

Office Hours:

Monday-Thursday 9:00 AM – 8:00 PM

Friday 9:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Saturday 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM