



August 8, 2015 – Grand Rapids, MI

Further Research Iron and ADHD

The final study I'll review this week turned into three. In my original research, a study from 2012 demonstrated a tendency for children with ADHD to have low levels of ferritin (1), a protein that can store iron until it's needed to make energy as well as other functions. When I came across the study, I checked to see if any further research had been done. Sure enough, two more studies confirmed that some children with ADHD have low ferritin levels (2,3).

The low ferritin was also associated with insomnia and restless-leg syndrome. The association doesn't necessarily mean cause and effect. The low ferritin could be masking some other cause such as a genetic cause or iron-absorption issue. Logically you would think that there would have been studies that examined iron supplementation for children with ADHD and low ferritin levels, but there was nothing more than a pilot study.

The simplest thing to do if you're a parent of a child with ADHD is to ask your pediatrician to do a serum ferritin test. If it's less than 30 ng/ml, discuss having your child take an iron supplement; remember you've got the references listed at the end of this message, and you can show them to the doctor if he or she has questions. Even without a wealth of research to back it up, it's certainly worth a try. The timing couldn't be better with school starting in a month. If it works, you might be able to keep your child off medications or be able to lower the dose. If it doesn't, there will be no downside because iron is a naturally occurring component of food.



Just be very conservative on the dose because iron can build up in the body. Around 10 to 20 mg per day seems about right in the form of ferrous fumarate, a non-heme form. In addition, have the child take iron with vitamin C to help with absorption and reduce the risk of constipation. If it's something you try with your child, or maybe with yourself—because adults have ADHD as well—let me know.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

References:

1. Expert Rev Neurother. 2012 Oct;12(10):1227-40.
2. BMC Pediatr. 2013 Dec 30;13:217.
3. Ann Med Health Sci Res. 2014 Sep;4(Suppl 3):S291-7.

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