

RISK OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN ADULTS WITH ADHD.

The association between attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and psychoactive substance use disorders in 120 adults with childhood-onset ADHD was evaluated with attention to comorbid mood, anxiety, and antisocial disorders in the Pediatric Psychopharmacology Unit, Psychiatric Service, Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston. The lifetime risk of drug and drug plus alcohol use disorders in the ADHD adults was 52% compared to 27% of 268 control non-ADHD adults. The increased risk of drug and alcohol abuse or dependence related to ADHD was independent of psychiatric comorbidity. Antisocial disorders increased risk of drug abuse independent of ADHD. Mood and anxiety disorders were associated with increased drug abuse in both ADHD and control non-ADHD adults. (Biederman J et al. Psychoactive substance use disorders in adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): effects of ADHD and comorbidity. Am J Psychiatry Nov 1995;152:1652-1658). (Reprints: Dr Biederman, ACC 725, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA 02114).

COMMENT. Childhood onset ADHD persisting in adults without comorbidity carried a 40% risk of a lifetime diagnosis of substance use disorders. Drug abuse or dependence and drug plus alcohol abuse, but not alcohol abuse alone, were significantly increased in grown-up ADHD children compared to non-ADHD adult controls. Psychiatric comorbidity increased the risk of drug abuse. Marijuana was most commonly used (30 ADHD adults), cocaine in 10, and stimulants in 8. There were no differences in the preferred drugs of abuse between ADHD adults and normal comparison subjects. These results contradict the commonly held view that ADHD patients may show a predilection for stimulant drug abuse.

EFFECT OF SUGAR ON BEHAVIOR AND COGNITION

Meta-analysis of 16 published studies conducted over a period of 12 years from 1982 to 1994 was used to examine the effects of sugar, mainly sucrose, on the behavior or cognition of children with attention deficit disorder and reported from the Department of Pediatrics, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN. In studies selected, subjects had consumed a known quantity of sugar; a placebo (artificial sweetener) control had been used; subjects, parents and researchers were blind to the conditions; and statistics had been used to compute the dependent measures effect sizes. Most investigators had used doses per kgm body wt ranging from 1.25 to 5.6 g. Aspartame was used as placebo in 13. No effect of sugar on behavior or cognitive performance of these children could be demonstrated by meta-analysis of the data. A small effect of sugar in the total group or effects on subsets of ADHD children could not be ruled out. (Wolraich ML et al. The effect of sugar on behavior or cognition in children. A meta-analysis. JAMA Nov 22/29, 1995;274:1617-1621). (Reprints: Dr Wolraich, Department of Pediatrics, Vanderbilt University, Child Development Center, 2100 Pierce Ave, 426 MCS, Nashville, TN 37232).

COMMENT. The controversy regarding sugar and behavior and cognition continues. Despite this and other studies negating an adverse effect of sugar, parents and some physicians cite sucrose as a frequent trigger of hyperactive behavior and inattention in children. The authors admit that a small adverse effect may be overlooked in a meta-analysis