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Food, diet and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common psychiatric diagnoses in childhood and adolescence and may persist into adulthood. ADHD is characterized by behavioral symptoms such as inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness. Medications such as methylphenidate have been shown to yield short-term symptom reduction and other beneficial outcomes in many individuals with ADHD. However, the extent of the efficacy of medication remains a matter of debate. In addition, the long-term pharmacotherapy of ADHD has been shown to have no proven efficacy and to be associated with adverse effects. This highlights the need to find alternative treatment approaches. Growing evidence suggests a significant relationship between quality of diet and mental health. Various nutrients have been linked to brain development and functioning, and diet may be an important factor in the high incidence and prevalence of psychiatric disorders including ADHD. Dietary improvement is therefore thought to be able to assist in the prevention and therapy of ADHD. Major food compounds proposed to be involved in the etiology of ADHD and to have therapeutic efficacy include polyunsaturated fatty acids and micronutrients such as minerals and vitamins. Furthermore, artificial food additives have been suggested to play a role in the etiology of ADHD and elimination diets have been tested for their therapeutic effects. There is currently no clear evidence supporting a role of single nutrients in the etiology and therapy of ADHD. However, the relationship between the whole diet and ADHD may be of greater importance.

Biography

Klaus W. Lange holds the chair of Biological, Clinical and Neuropsychology at the University of Regensburg, Germany. His main research interests are in the areas of nutrition and physical activity in mental health as well as health psychology and neuropsychology. He is president of the International Movement and Nutrition Society and Editor-in-Chief of movement and nutrition in health and disease.

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