

IMPLICATIONS OF EPILEPSY: BEYOND SEIZURES

Epilepsy and ADHD

Children with epilepsy are more likely to have attention deficits than children without epilepsy.

■ Causes

Although the cause is unclear, reasons may include the location of lesions in the brain that cause epilepsy and medication side effects.

FACT

There are different ways a person can pay attention.

Selective Attention – directing focus on one thing while ignoring irrelevant information or noise.

Sustained Attention – maintaining attention over a longer period of time to pick up infrequent events.

Divided Attention – paying attention to several things at once.

■ Treatments

Better seizure control can help improve attention. Treatment options include:

- Surgery
- Medication
- Cognitive rehabilitation

■ Strategies for Parents

- Provide your child with a quiet area to do their homework.
- Reduce visual and noise distractions while your child works on a task.
- Alternate recreation and work.

- Use a blank sheet to cover the working sheet and move it to reveal one question at a time. This helps reduce visual distractions.
- When your child engages in an activity for a longer period of time, encourage them.
- If your child is hyperactive as well, integrate movement (e.g. jumping, drawing) into learning.

■ Strategies for Educators

- Create a school intervention plan to inform teachers and school management about the child’s needs. Revisit the plan after six months.
- Contact teachers, school staff, and parents monthly to discuss the child’s progress.
- Cut back on optional courses or coursework to provide the student with more time to work on essential course material.
- Stay close to the child while providing explanations and use their material to give examples.
- Remove class distractions whenever possible.
- Encourage the student to actively participate in the class. This will help maintain their attention.
- Establish a signal with the student so you can alert each other when the child is unfocused or is having difficulty in the class.
- Use the student’s first name in examples.
- Keep instructions short.
- Break long instructions into shorter segments. Present the segments one at a time for each step in the activity instead of all together at the beginning.

Epilepsy and ADHD *continued*

- Evaluate the child using a series of short tests over several days instead of one long test.
- Place the child's desk at the front of the class, close to the teacher and far from distracting windows and doors.
- Pair the student with a partner who could help, with whom they have a good relationship.
- If the student struggles with hyperactivity as well as attention deficit, assign the student tasks that will get them moving around (e.g. bring items to the teacher's desk, take messages to the office).

Adapted from "Cognitive Deficits in Children with Epilepsy" (Mary L. Smith, Anne Gallagher, and Maryse Lassonde).

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