

Ask Leyla: Could poor diet be causing ADHD?



Q: My girlfriend eats fast-food at least once a day. Her daughter has been raised with no vegetables, no fruit, packaged chicken nuggets, and tons of soda for the most part since age two. Now 12 years old, she is about 4'6" and 20 pounds overweight.

Is it possible her small height (both her parents are taller) and her poor grades at school are the result of consuming an awful diet from such a young age? My girlfriend insists that these are not nutrition-related, but that the girl has a learning disability and wants to put her daughter on medication such as Vyvanse for her cognitive impairment. Could dietary changes help?

A: I see cases like this a lot, where parents aren't aware of the critical association between what we choose to eat and the quality of our health—physical, mental, emotional, and otherwise. Because **eating habits are strongly ingrained in our formative years**, changing them can be challenging, especially in a twelve-year-old who has access to junk food outside of the house after school and during time spent with friends.

It is likely that your girlfriend's daughter has some nutritional deficiencies, given the lack of vegetable and fruit intake that you describe. Processed foods like chicken nuggets contain trans fats and MSG. MSG is known to cause neurological symptoms and the displacement of quality fats with trans fats is implicated in learning deficits and behavioral issues. And soda is, well, pretty toxic between the sugar, phosphoric acid, and colorings it contains. This is definitely a recipe for cognitive impairment, ADHD, and learning difficulties in school.

With regard to her height, she will continue to grow in stature until age 16 or so. It's hard to say at this point in time whether she will be short in stature later on. Indeed, cleaning up her diet will only help.

Besides micronutrient deficiencies, food allergies and intolerances are frequently implicated in learning disabilities and ADHD. A full workup is recommended. Often, the fixes can be much simpler and certainly less harmful. You can read more about ADHD on the *Intelligent Medicine* website, and can listen to Dr. Hoffman's podcast about it [here](#).

Vyvanse is typically used for ADHD and has its own set of problems, including possible dependence and abuse.

There are far too many diagnoses of ADHD as it is, in my opinion, and children are

overmedicated as a result. Remember, medication is not a panacea if it's only treating symptoms. Intelligent nutrition elucidates the cause and treats it appropriately.

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