

# ADHD OR OBSTRUCTIVE Sleep Apnea?

## *Does my child have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or could it be a sleep disorder?*

Obstructive sleep apnea in children is on the rise and should be considered when diagnosing ADHD. Children are often diagnosed with ADHD and prescribed medication to treat behavioral issues without exploring sleep deprivation or sleep apnea. When a child's sleep is disrupted or delayed; daytime behavior can mimic ADHD symptoms. Teachers or caregivers may report lack of concentration, disruptive behavior, moodiness or irritability in the child. Parents may describe difficulties with bedtime routines, poor or restless sleepers.

## *What are the symptoms for ADHD and sleep disorder?*

### *Children with ADHD show symptoms of:*

- **Hyperactivity:** Talking excessively, unable to play quietly, always on the go, frequent movements or fidgeting
- **Impulsivity:** Impatient, interrupts conversations, blurts out answers
- **Inattention:** Lack of focus, easily distracted, unorganized, makes careless mistakes

### *Children with sleep disorder show signs of:*

- **Difficulty paying attention:** Daydreaming, lack of focus, makes careless mistakes
- **Aggressive behavior:** Moodiness, tantrums, defiant
- **Hyperactivity:** Talking excessively, always on the go, fidgeting
- **Behavior problems at school:** Homework not completed, difficulty understanding concepts
- **Snoring**
- **Restless Legs:** Feels like bugs are crawling on them
- **Bed Wetting**

Children are subject to unexpected changes in their behavior and functioning when their sleep is disrupted, especially if on a nightly basis. Unlike adults, who become sleepy with insufficient sleep, children have the opposite reaction. They become hyperactive. They may appear to be "constantly on the go," inattentive, unorganized, and unmanageable. This may pose as hyperactivity and may be misdiagnosed as ADHD. In addition, there may be emotional outpourings such as aggression, crying, and inappropriate behaviors. School performance may suffer and learning may be impeded.

## *What sleep disorder could my child have?*

Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA), Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS), Insomnia or Snoring.

## *If my child has ADHD do they have a sleep disorder?*

Not every child with ADHD has a sleep disorder, but they may. About fifty percent of parents report their child with ADHD had difficulty sleeping, feels tired when they wake up, have nightmares, snores, or had other sleep disorders such as sleep apnea. Some parents reported, after having a sleep study and treatment for sleep disorder, ADHD symptoms went away.

## *How does sleep apnea effect behavior?*

When children have disrupted or delayed sleep, either due to an inadequate amount of sleep, snoring, restless legs or sleep apnea, there is a considerable influence on their daytime behaviors. Sleep disorders in children can be corrected with tonsillectomy, adenoidectomy, allergy treatment or CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) when sleep apnea persists after other treatment efforts.

## *Why does sleep apnea effect children differently than adults?*

There are different theories as to why sleep apnea effects children differently, one plausible theory is children have a strong drive to be awake during a critical period of learning and development. The drive to stay awake, with nightly sleep disturbances may cause children to seek stimulating activities and have the urge for high level physical activity. It is also thought that the area of the brain called the prefrontal cortex, important in regulating behaviors and decision-making, may be especially vulnerable to sleep deprivation. This would cause behavioral issues in sleep deprived children.

## *What to Do If You Are Concerned About Your Child's Sleep*

If your child has difficulty with behavior during the day, you may wish to seek a thorough sleep evaluation. Sleep disorders may be contributing to the daytime difficulties. Fortunately, there are many effective treatment options available that may help your child to sleep better and thrive. Start by speaking with your pediatrician and consider a consultation with Dr. Oktai Mamedov, a board-certified sleep specialist who works with children in the Lansing area. Dr. Mamedov specializes in pediatric sleep medicine and is educated in both disorders.

If you are concerned about your child's behavioral issues, call 517-755-6888 to make an appointment at Comprehensive Sleep Center with Dr. Mamedov.

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