

What is the relationship between ADHD and obesity / eating habits?

By: Shirley Hershko PhD

Adults with ADHD have unhealthy eating habits, leading to overweight/obesity, with the odds ratio increasing with age. They are also suffering more from eating disorders.

Individuals with ADHD have a higher body mass index (BMI) and a **higher prevalence of obesity**, with the **odds ratio increasing with age**. Indeed, the pooled prevalence increase by about 70% in adults and 40% in children. Additionally, individuals with ADHD suffer more from **eating disorders** (OR=3.82*), especially **binge eating** (OR=4.13).

Several mechanisms have been suggested to account for this association including shared **genetic transmission, dysregulation of**

dopamine, mood lability, psychiatric comorbidities, and low participation in physical activity, impulsivity, inattention, and poor eating habits. It was found that **both children and adults with ADHD consume less healthy foods** (such as vegetables, fruits, and dairy products) and more unhealthy foods (fatty, sweet and processed foods, such as snacks, candies, “fast food” and “junk food.”)

*OR=3.82 means 3.82 times more likely



About the Author

Shirley Hershko is the director of the diagnostic and support center, a senior teacher, and a researcher at the Hebrew University in Israel. Her study won an award at the World Congress on ADHD.

Further Reading:

- Hershko S, Aronis A, Maeir A, Pollak Y. (2018). Dysfunctional Eating Patterns of Adults With Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. J Nerv Ment Dis. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328663673_Dysfunctional_Eating_Patterns_of_Adults_With_Attention_Deficit_Hyperactivity_Disorder
- Egbert AH, Wilfley DE, Eddy KT, Boutelle KN, Zucker N, Peterson CB, Celio Doyle A, Le Grange D, Goldschmidt AB. Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Symptoms Are Associated with Overeating with and without Loss of Control in Youth with Overweight/Obesity. Child Obes. 2018 Jan;14(1):50-57. doi: 10.1089/chi.2017.0114. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5743031/>
- Cortese S, Moreira-Maia CR, St Fleur D, Morcillo-Penalver C, Rohde LA, Faraone SV. (2016). Association Between ADHD and Obesity: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. Am J Psychiatry. <https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ajp.2015.15020266>
- Nigg JT, Johnstone JM, Musser ED, Long HG, Willoughby MT, Shannon J. (2016). Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and being overweight/obesity: New data and meta-analysis. Clin Psychol Rev. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5247534/>