

ADHD symptoms worsen quality of life for individuals with autism

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Research supported by the Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network (ATN), demonstrating that symptoms of attention deficit and hyperactivity worsen quality of life for individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), was presented today at the Society for Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas.

Researchers Parul Vora, M.D., developmental-behavioral pediatric fellow at Nationwide Children's and Darryn Sikora, Ph.D., Director of the Autism Program at Oregon Health Sciences University, used data exclusively from the ATN Registry to examine whether the presence of symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) might have additional impact on the adaptive functioning and quality of life of children and adolescents with ASD. After reviewing measures of attention and hyperactivity, and measures of quality of life, for over 2,000 children and adolescents with ASD, they found that over half of this group had symptoms of either attention or hyperactivity problems. More than a third had significant symptoms of both.

Children with ASD frequently have other [symptoms](#) that may compound difficulties with communication, socialization and restricted interests. More than one in three children evaluated had symptoms suggesting that they might have ADHD. Approximately one in ten of the children studied were receiving stimulant medications typically used to treat ADHD. This suggests that most of these children and adolescents with ASD and ADHD symptoms are not being treated with medications for these inattentive and hyperactive symptoms.

Children with ASD have lower adaptive functioning – the ability to get along in daily situations – than typically developing children. Not only does the presence of ADHD symptoms compromise their adaptive abilities, [quality of life](#) is further reduced.

"Identification of ADHD symptoms in children with ASD is important so that health care providers can work to treat these issues. Further research is needed to determine whether stimulant medication improves ADHD symptoms in children with ASD," explained ATN Medical Director Daniel Coury, M.D.

Dr. Coury explained why this research is important to the ATN. "Because it's very common for children with ASD to present other medical symptoms and diagnoses, a primary goal of the ATN is to create a model of comprehensive medical care for children and adolescents with autism, and best practices to be shared with medical practitioners throughout North America and around the world."

More information: For those families considering medication to address their child's ADHD symptoms, the ATN offers the Medication Decision Aid Tool Kit to help families create an appropriate treatment plan in collaboration with their child's doctor or medical practitioner. The Medication Decision Aid Tool Kit is free of charge and available to download from www.autismspeaks.org/science/research/tools-you-can-use

Provided by Autism Speaks

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