

Study finds children with ADHD have questions for their doctor but don't ask them

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Children with ADHD find it more difficult to focus and to complete their schoolwork. Credit: public domain image

Children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder want to ask their physicians about their condition and medications but often don't, according to researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The study could help doctors and parents leverage this interest to

help children better manage their ADHD.

"We have found that there has been very little research into how providers, parents and youth communicate about ADHD and ADHD medications," said Betsy Sleath, the lead author of the study and the George H. Cocolas Distinguished Professor at the UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy. "What we do know is that kids often aren't part of the conversation when their parents and [doctors](#) are talking ADHD. We wanted to know how the kids felt about that."

Sleath's team recruited 48 boys and 22 girls ranging in age from 7 to 17 years at two private pediatric practices in North Carolina who had been diagnosed with ADHD and prescribed medicine, and examined how [children](#) with ADHD perceive communication with their pediatric care providers, whether they say they take their ADHD medications correctly and where they prefer to learn about their condition.

The children were also asked if they wished their doctor talked to them more about ADHD. They were asked what made it hard to talk to their doctor about ADHD and what would make it easier to talk to their doctor about ADHD.

One-third of the children said they wished their physician talked with them more about ADHD during visits. Study participants had at least eight unasked questions on average about ADHD and its treatment. Common questions included will I grow out of ADHD, how will my medicine affect me and what are the side effects of my ADHD medicine?

Most of the children said they wanted to learn about ADHD at their provider's office and wanted their providers to engage them more during visits, the researchers found.

"These results highlight the fact that children with ADHD want their physician to focus more on them during doctor visits," said Sleath, who also chairs the School's Division of Pharmaceutical Outcomes and Policy. "Health-care providers should take advantage of this interest to engage youth more in discussions regarding ADHD and its treatment."

Sleath suggests that physicians work to make children feel more comfortable talking about their ADHD and should make a special effort to ask the children what questions they have.

"By asking children questions and letting them talk more during visits, both the provider and parent might learn more about the youth's perspective on ADHD and what they would like to learn about their condition. Improving provider-youth communication about ADHD and ADHD medications could increase [medication](#) adherence and improve outcomes.

More information: Betsy Sleath et al. Youth Views on Communication About ADHD and Medication Adherence, *Community Mental Health Journal* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s10597-016-0078-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-016-0078-3)

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