Evaluation and treatment of sleep problems in children diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: an update of the evidence

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION:
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) affects approximately 5% of all children and adolescents, and these patients frequently suffer from sleep problems. The association between sleep disorders and ADHD, however, is multifaceted and complex.

AIMS:
To explore the relationship between sleep disorders and ADHD.

DEVELOPMENT:
Sleep problems in children with ADHD include altered sleep and specific disorders per se or that may be due to comorbid psychiatric disorders or to the stimulants they receive as a treatment for their ADHD. Today, an evaluation of the sleep conditions in children with ADHD is recommended before starting pharmacological treatment. The first step in managing their sleep problems is good sleep hygiene and cognitive-behavioural psychotherapy. Another option is to consider modifying the dosage and formulation of the stimulants. Atomoxetine and melatonin are therapeutic alternatives for children with ADHD and more severe sleep problems. Specific treatments exist for respiratory and movement disorders during sleep.

CONCLUSIONS:
It is important to evaluate sleep in children who present symptoms suggestive of ADHD since problems during sleep can play a causal role or exacerbate the clinical features of ADHD. Correct evaluation and treatment of sleep disorders increase the family's and the child's quality of life and can lessen the severity of the symptoms of ADHD.