Does my child have both autism and ADHD?

This is a very common question asked by our parents of our autistic patients at the Lurie Center for autism. Autism is an increasingly common condition, with 1 in 44 children in the U.S. having been identified with autism, per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).\(^1\) Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is even more common – with up to 9.8% of children aged 3-17 having ever been diagnosed with ADHD.\(^2\) It is also quite common to have both, with perhaps up to 70% of children with autism having had an ADHD diagnosis in childhood.

Although autism and ADHD often co-occur, they are clinically distinct conditions. Autism is characterized by having differences in social communication skills and certain repetitive patterns of behaviors that are problematic to a person's wellbeing. ADHD is characterized by having difficulty paying attention, being quick to react or impulsive, and hyperactivity to the extent that it impacts their daily functioning.

Like autism, the diagnosis of ADHD is largely based on expert clinical judgement, based on established criteria.\(^3\) Your doctor at the Lurie center may ask for standardize rating scales to be completed by caregivers, educational or behavioral providers, or the patient themselves. In some situations, detailed neuropsychological testing may be needed to help distinguish between ASD and ADHD-related symptoms.

Natural treatments for ADHD involved a healthy diet, plenty of exercise, and plenty of sleep. Behavioral and educational interventions are strongly recommended. Occupational therapy can also be beneficial. Prescribed medications can also be an effective part of treatment and should be considered for those age 6 years or older for whom educational and behavioral and, depending on the degree of symptoms, upon discussion with your doctor at the Lurie Center.

For more information about ADHD – see:

- CHADD.org;
- www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/Pages/default.aspx
- www.aacap.org/aacap/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/ADHD_Resource_Center/Home.aspx

\(^{1}\) https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html
\(^{2}\) https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/data.html
\(^{3}\) https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/diagnosis.html