



Beyond the diagnosis:

A Clinician's Guide to the 5 Root Causes of ADHD Symptoms



By Aleksandra Besterfeldt, PMHNP
Functional Psychiatry for Children



Hi There!

I'm Aleksandra, a psychiatric nurse practitioner and the founder of a functional psychiatry program dedicated to kids just like yours. Over the years, I've seen how families are often left with a diagnosis—but no deeper understanding of why their child is struggling with focus, behavior, or mood.

This guide was born out of my frustration with “band-aid” solutions that overlook what's really going on inside the body and brain. I've spent years training in both conventional and integrative psychiatry, and I want to help you understand the root causes of ADHD—because that's where true healing begins. You're not alone in this. And I'm honored to walk with you.

Warmly,
Aleksandra Besterfeldt, PMHNP-BC, AGNP-FPA, FMCP-M



EMBRACE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

ADHD is more than a diagnosis

ADHD is a real, brain-based condition—but many of the symptoms are made worse by hidden imbalances in the body. A child who is unfocused may actually be nutrient-deficient. A child who is impulsive may be riding a blood sugar rollercoaster. A child with meltdowns might have gut inflammation that affects the brain.

ADHD is often linked to:

- **Brain chemistry imbalances** (dopamine, norepinephrine)
- **Nutrient deficiencies** that affect neurotransmitter production
- **Gut health issues** and inflammation
- **Blood sugar fluctuations** that affect mood and energy
- **Sleep disruption** and circadian rhythm imbalance
- **Environmental toxins** or stress overload

Functional psychiatry asks:

“What systems in the body might be driving this behavior?”

In this guide, I'll walk you through the **TOP 5 ROOT CAUSES** I see in my practice—and what you can start doing today.



Nutrient Deficiencies

Nutrients are the building blocks of brain chemistry. Without them, the brain can't function properly.

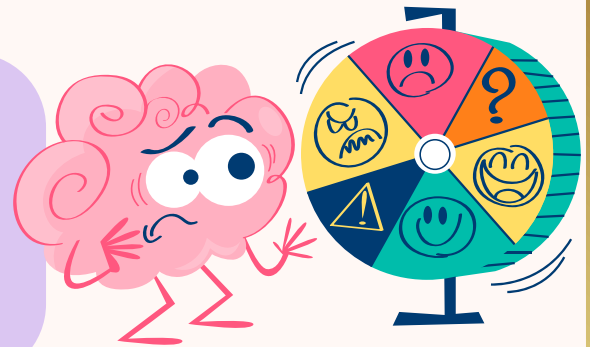


What parents often don't know:

- Children with ADHD often have lower levels of **magnesium, iron, zinc, and omega-3s**—all essential for calming the nervous system and making neurotransmitters like dopamine.
- Even a “healthy” diet can be low in these nutrients due to soil depletion, picky eating, or poor absorption (especially if the child has gut issues).

How it shows up:

- Emotional reactivity or tantrums
- Restlessness and muscle tension
- Poor focus and memory
- Craving salty or processed foods



How I evaluate this:

I often order blood tests (like serum ferritin, RBC magnesium, and omega-3 index) and assess for clinical signs like ridged nails or restless sleep.



TRY THIS AT HOME:

- Add a handful of pumpkin seeds (rich in magnesium and zinc) to snacks.
- Look into an ADHD-specific multivitamin with bioavailable nutrients.



Blood Sugar Dysregulation

This one surprises many parents.

What parents often don't know:



- Blood sugar swings—especially drops—can cause **meltdowns**, **irritability**, **brain fog**, and **hyperactivity**.
- Many children with ADHD eat lots of carbs but not enough protein or fat to stabilize glucose.
- “Hangry” is real: When blood sugar crashes, stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline spike.



How it shows up:

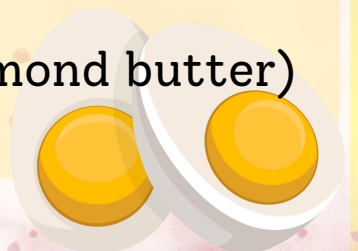
- Sudden emotional outbursts, especially late morning or afternoon
- Energy crashes or zoning out after meals
- Constant snacking or extreme hunger

How I evaluate this:

I take a close dietary history and may recommend a finger-prick glucose test or CGM (continuous glucose monitor) in complex cases.

TRY THIS AT HOME:

- Add protein to breakfast (eggs, nut butter, chia pudding).
- Pair carbs with fat (like fruit + almond butter) to slow sugar release.

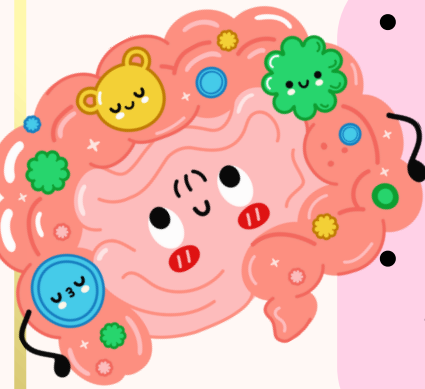


Root Cause #3

Gut-Brain Axis Disruption

This one surprises many The gut is often called the “second brain,” and it produces over **90% of the body’s serotonin.**

What parents often don’t know:



- Children with ADHD frequently have **gut inflammation**, food sensitivities, or an imbalance in gut bacteria (dysbiosis).
- Chronic constipation, even if “normal” for your child, can increase toxin buildup and affect mood and focus.

How it shows up:

- Constipation, gas, bloating, or foul-smelling stool
- Mood swings, brain fog, or anxious behavior
- Food sensitivities (especially to dairy, gluten, or artificial dyes)



How I evaluate this:

I ask detailed digestive questions and may recommend stool testing or an elimination diet trial to uncover hidden triggers.

TRY THIS AT HOME:

- Reduce ultra-processed foods for 5 days.
- Add 1 serving of probiotic-rich foods daily (e.g., unsweetened yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut).



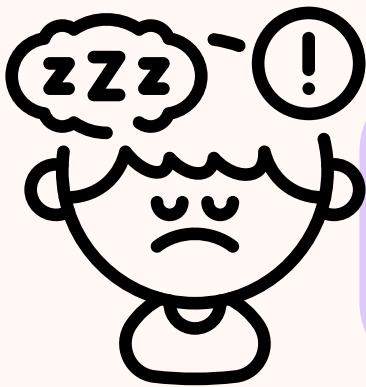
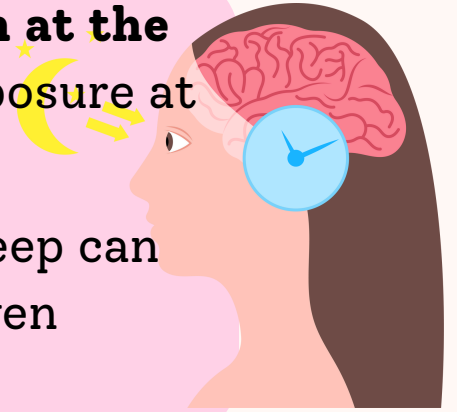
Root Cause #4

Sleep Problems

Sleep is the foundation of brain function. Without it, everything—from impulse control to memory—suffers.

What parents often don't know:

- Kids with ADHD may **produce melatonin at the wrong times**, often due to blue light exposure at night or cortisol dysregulation.
- Snoring, mouth breathing, or restless sleep can signal **sleep-disordered breathing** or even undiagnosed **sleep apnea**.



How it shows up:

- Irritability in the morning or “second wind” late at night
- Trouble waking up, even after 8+ hours
- Daytime fatigue that mimics inattention

How I evaluate this:

I screen for sleep hygiene, environmental triggers, and may recommend a sleep study if apnea is suspected.

TRY THIS AT HOME:

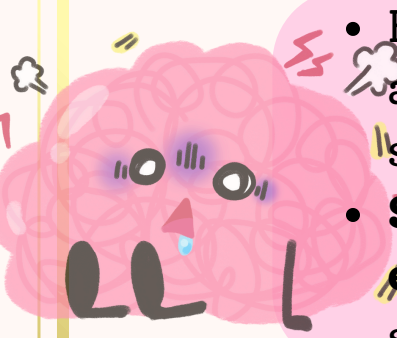
- Turn off screens 60 minutes before bed and use amber glasses or apps to reduce blue light.
- Create a calming, screen-free bedtime routine with dim lights and magnesium lotion.



Environmental and Lifestyle Stressors

Today's kids face stressors previous generations didn't –both biologically and emotionally.

What parents often don't know:

- 
- Exposure to **heavy metals, plastics, food dyes,** and **pesticides** can impact the developing nervous system.
 - **Sensory overload, screen addiction,** and **emotional overwhelm** can mimic or worsen ADHD symptoms.

How it shows up:


- Poor tolerance to noise, tags, or textures
- Hyperactivity after screen time or food dyes
- Anxiety, meltdowns, or oppositional behavior in chaotic environments



How I evaluate this:

I take a detailed environmental history and consider testing for heavy metals, mold exposure, or cortisol patterns.

TRY THIS AT HOME:

- 
- Reduce plastic containers and processed snacks with additives.
 - Add daily grounding time: walks, nature, or 15 minutes of screen-free creative play.



Ready to go deeper?

If you're nodding your head, feeling like “this explains my child”—
I want to invite you to take the next step.

In my functional psychiatry program, I partner with families to uncover and treat the **root causes** of your child's ADHD symptoms. My approach includes:

- ✓ Comprehensive lab testing and functional assessments
- ✓ Nutrition and lifestyle plans customized to your child
- ✓ Natural and medication-based options as needed
- ✓ Emotional support for both child and parent

📞 **Book a free 15-minute discovery call** to learn if this approach is right for your family.

www.embracebehavioral.com

info@embracebehavioral.com

Based in Illinois | Telehealth available statewide

—“

You're not alone. There is a better way—and I'd be honored to help you find it.

—with care,

Aleksandra Besterfeldt, PMHNP-BC, AGNP-FPA, FMCP-M
Functional Psychiatry for Children

—”

EMBRACE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH