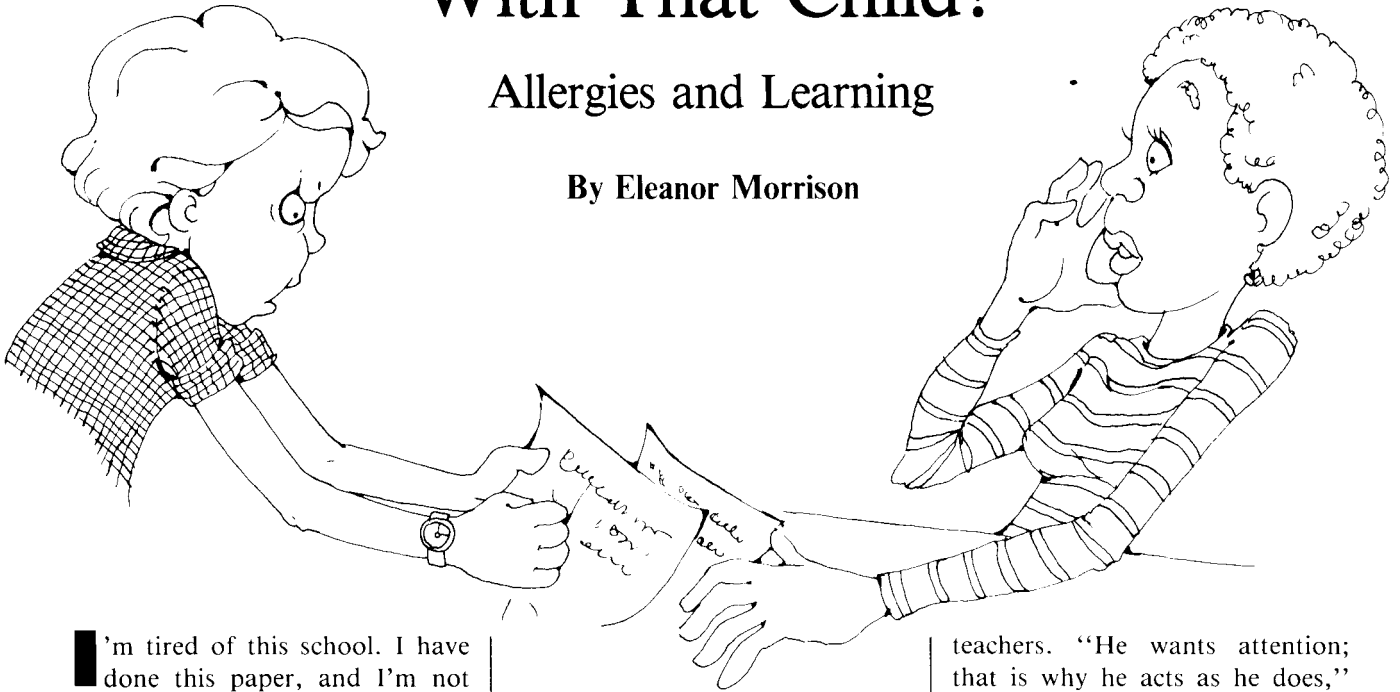


What Are We Going To Do With That Child?

Allergies and Learning

By Eleanor Morrison



I'm tired of this school. I have done this paper, and I'm not going to do it again. This is it. If you want to give me an 'F', OK, but this is all you're getting." Matt slammed his paper down on the teacher's desk and stomped out of the classroom. When he got home, he sassed his mother and complained about what a bad day he had had.

Teachers wonder what to do with the hard-to-manage children they see in their classrooms. The extreme cases of hyperactivity are given medication, which seems to calm the children down. But what about the child who is sometimes hyperactive but sometimes seems to be all right, the borderline child who is sometimes pretty good and sometimes not so good? How can the teacher help him learn anything, even if she manages to keep him from disrupting others in the classroom?

Recent studies by physicians, including Dr. William Crook of the Massachusetts Association for

Children With Learning Disabilities and Dr. William Philpott, former research director of Fuller Memorial Hospital in Massachusetts, have indicated that some children seem to become hyperactive and/or irritable and difficult to deal with because of things in their environment.¹

For example, Matt, whom we heard about at the beginning of this article, often came home from school complaining, "Mom, I could hardly study at all today. I have a terrible headache, and I felt really sick all day."

"Do you have any idea why?" his mother would ask.

"Well, I sit behind Tami and she wears all that awful perfume. It makes me feel sick."

Other times he complained about people's hairspray. When his mother began to suspect that Matt might be allergic, she discussed this possibility with his

teachers. "He wants attention; that is why he acts as he does," said one teacher.

"You are just giving him excuses for bad behavior by saying he is allergic," agreed Matt's grandfather.

When Matt was checked for food and other allergies, tests revealed that sugar made him extremely hyperactive and irritable, as did many food colorings. Milk gave him headaches and stomachaches. It also made him depressed. A number of hydrocarbon-based items affected him adversely as well. He did not appear to have pollen allergies, but did react to dust and some animal dander.

Seasonal and Food Allergies

The child who does rather well in school for part of the year and poorly for the rest of the time may have seasonal allergies to pollens, dust in the room, molds caused by dampness, or may even be allergic to the classroom pet.

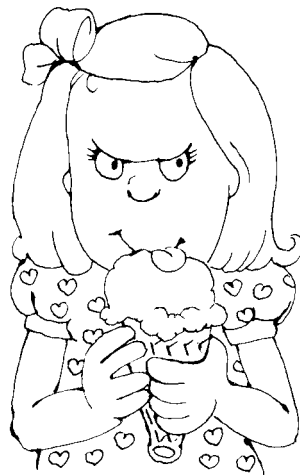
In addition, many children are

extremely sensitive to the foods they eat. William Hudspeth of the University of Reno, Nevada, says "Sugar can cause a whole range of behavior problems, including depression, hyperactivity and acting out behaviors that may be extremely antisocial."²

"Sugar in the form of candy and pastries did crazy things to me," admitted one dieter quoted in *The Thin Book*. "My mood was awful. I was easily agitated and bad tempered."³

Dr. William Crook, of the Association for Child Learning Disabilities, discussed the allergic-tension-fatigue syndrome. "Youngsters with this problem may be hyperactive, easily fatigued and irritable or easily depressed. . . . Aggression and learning problems are common symptoms."⁴

Dr. Ben Feingold, Chief Emeritus, Allergy Department, Kaiser Foundation Hospital, San Francisco, indicates that "although many of the children [tested] were of normal or high IQ, they had learning difficulties because they manifested such impetuosity that they could not get the words out of their mouths and they were unable to sit still long enough to concentrate on their school-



work."⁵ In some children, even common foods could cause problems.

The removal of offending foods from the diet of disturbed or learning disabled children can result in dramatic improvement in behavior, attention span, and concentration It has been the universal observation of these investigators who assess the child's nutritional status that they eat a diet which is richest in sugar, candy, sweets, and in foods made with sugar. The removal of these foods results in a dramatic decrease in hyperactivity.⁶

Carol Fuhrman, third-grade teacher in a Lodi, California, school, in a 1981 interview on the "Good Morning, California" show, indicated that she could see

the effects of sugar on the children in her class, particularly after parties or sweets-oriented holidays, such as Halloween or Christmas. Other teachers have noted a big difference in the behavior of their students after they have been eating freely of desserts.⁷

Help for the Teacher

What can a teacher do to help lessen the problems of the allergic child? Here are some suggestions:

- Ask that school hot lunches contain no sugar, food colorings, or additives. Request that no cupcakes or candy be served at parties during school hours. Instead, find something else special to serve, or do something special.

- Suggest to parents of hyperactive children that their children's diets be checked for excessive sugars, additives, food colorings, pop and cola drinks. In some children, none of the above items can be allowed.

- Point out to the parent that the child may suffer from fatigue. Allergic children are tired and stressed, and additional pressure of any kind may be too much for them. Recommend that the parents consult with a good pediatrician regarding their child's problems.

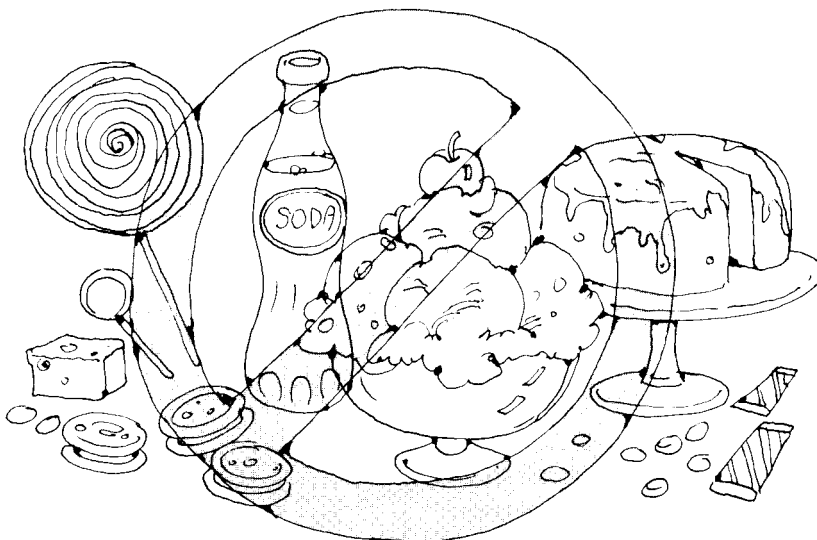
- Encourage the children in your classroom to always eat a good breakfast.

"Our bodies are built from what we eat. Therefore, we should choose foods carefully for building up the body," wrote Dr. Ralph Libby in the Glen Burnie, Maryland, *Register*.⁸

Eliminating Allergens in the Classroom

- Make sure that the classroom is as dust-free and clean as possible. Eliminate dark or damp places where mold can grow.

- If you have a hyperactive child in your classroom, try to



avoid having a classroom pet, or have a nonfeathered, nonfurred pet for that school year.

- Keep your own application of hairsprays to an absolute minimum, using only unscented ones, and don't wear perfume or after-shave. Use of these items by students in school should also be discouraged. (See Phil Donahue Transcript No. 02181, page 21, for further information on their effect on allergic persons.⁹)

- Enhance the child's self-image. The initial step in this process has to be taken by the parents and the teacher in their own attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about the child. It is important to understand that this almost uncontrollable child has all the potential of any other child. Try to see the pupil as a calm, poised, and healthy individual. Practice each night before you go to sleep seeing the child this way, and before long he or she will tend to live up to your expectations.¹⁰ Remember, he or she is also a child of God.

Structuring the Classroom Atmosphere

- In dealing with the hyperac-



tive child, employ quiet, firm, loving discipline. Such children need a structured, calm atmosphere in which to work. A noisy, cluttered classroom only aggravates their problems.

- Try to alternate the child's classwork with quiet and active tasks. Hyperactive children seem to need a great deal of large muscle activity.

- When the child acts up, fools around, fails to do his or her school work, talks back, lies, or misbehaves, he or she is showing that he has reached the upper limits of stress tolerance.¹¹ The next thing that happens, no matter how small, will be the "straw that breaks the camel's back."

Teaching the Child to Adapt

- Urge the child to learn to live in harmony with his or her own physical capabilities. Hyperactive children need to eat properly and obtain adequate rest. They need to learn how to adjust to their special problems. They may be using a great deal of self-control (even if it does not show) and should be regularly encouraged and praised when they do the right thing.

The problems of the irritable, cranky, hyperactive child will not go away overnight. However, with the loving intervention of the

adults in his or her life, the child with this problem should show significant improvement within a few weeks or months. □

FOOTNOTES

¹ Dr. William Crook of the Association for Child Learning Disabilities, as quoted in "The Little Boy who Became a Jekyll-and-Hyde," *Reader's Digest*, 118:707 (March, 1981), p. 77.

² Dr. William Philpott, Research Director, Fuller Memorial Hospital, South Attleboro, Massachusetts, as quoted in *New Hope for the Arthritic*, "Specific Examples of Diseases Caused by Allergy to Food," (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1975), p. 81.

³ *Health Quarterly (Plus Two)*, 6:1 (January-February, 1981).

⁴ *The Thin Book*, Jeane Eddy Westlin. (Com Care Publications, U.S., 1978).

⁵ Dr. William Crook, as quoted in *Reader's Digest*, 118:707 (March, 1981), p. 77.

⁶ *New Hope for the Arthritic*, Collin H. Dong, M.D., Jane Banks (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, p. 82). Quotation from Dr. Feingold.

⁷ *A Physician's Handbook of Orthomolecular Medicine*, edited by Roger J. Williams and Dwight K. Kalita (Pergamon Press, 1977) as quoted by Richard and Mary-Alice Jafolla in "New Hope for the Hyper-active Child," *Family Life Today* (March, 1981).

⁸ TV Interview, "Good Morning, California," October 27, 1981. Robert Stanford, Interview, November, 1981.

⁹ Dr. Ralph Libby as quoted by "The Senior Connection," *The Register* (Glen Burnie, Maryland).

¹⁰ Phil Donahue Television Program, Chicago, Illinois, Transcript No. 02181, p. 21.

¹¹ "Hope for the Hyper-active Child," *Family Life Today* (March, 1981).

¹² "How Could He Do This to Me?" Judy Brown as told to Sharon Carter, *Good House-keeping*, 190:2 (February, 1980), p. 40.

ADDITIONAL READING SUGGESTIONS

The Allergy Handbook, *Parents* magazine, June, 1981.

Brochures from The Environmental Illness Association, P.O. Box 5003, Berkeley, CA 94705.

Or write: The Society for Clinical Ecology, 1750 Humboldt Street, Denver, Colorado 80218 or Human Ecology Action League, 505 North Lake Shore Drive, Suite 6506, Chicago, Illinois 60611.

Book: *Clinical Ecology*, by Theron G. Randolph, M.D., edited by Lawrence D. Dickey (published by Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Illinois, 1976).