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U of L researcher exploring micronutrient treatment for ADHD in children

Parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may search for an alternative to the stimulant medication that is typically prescribed for the disorder, but the effectiveness of alternative approaches hasn't been well established.

Dr. Brenda Leung, assistant professor and the Emmy Droog Chair of Complementary and Alternative Healthcare at the University of Lethbridge's Faculty of Health Sciences, hopes to change that with a new study that's the first of its kind in North America.

"There is a strong public desire for the development of non-pharmaceutical treatment options," says Leung. "Several lines of evidence suggest that symptoms of ADHD respond well to treatment with nutrient supplementation, but more research is needed."

In collaboration with colleagues at the University of Calgary, Oregon Health and Science University and The Ohio State University, Leung will help document the safety and effectiveness of a micronutrient combination in American and Canadian youth.

"This multi-site clinical research trial allows us to replicate studies conducted overseas and extend the findings by beginning to examine for whom, and how, the treatment might work," says Leung.

Leung is the principal investigator at the Lethbridge site — the research will also be conducted in Oregon and Ohio — for an eight-week randomized, controlled trial using broad-spectrum micronutrients. The treatment consists of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and nutrient extracts. The researchers aim to lay a foundation for understanding how micronutrients work at the metabolic level. They will collect biological samples and interview parents and youth to rate their symptoms, functioning and overall experience of the treatment.

Study participants will be randomly assigned to either the micronutrient group or the placebo group and all participants will be eligible to take the vitamins and minerals for an additional eight weeks after the randomized phase.

The study is currently underway and the researchers are looking for participants between the ages of six and 12, who are not taking medication for ADHD and who are willing and able to swallow up to 12 pills per day. Throughout the course of the study, participants will come to the U of L five times to meet with study researchers to answer questions and receive the product. For more information, contact Leung at 403-329-2366, or Mashal Fida, research assistant, at 403-332-4535, or send an email to healthykids@uleth.ca.

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Contact

Caroline Zentner, public affairs advisor
403-394-3975 or 403-795-5403 (cell)
caroline.zentner@uleth.ca