

## PARENTS UNSURE ABOUT

**Dear Dr. Donohue:** My 8-year-old son is in the third grade. School has been a problem for him from the start. He's a very active little boy and finds it hard to sit still, even at home. Teachers have suggested he has attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and urge us to put him on Ritalin. My husband is opposed to it, and I don't know. We would like to hear what you have to say.

— R.T.

**Answer:** There is no single test that identifies a child (or an adult) as having attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. There is, however, a list of signs and symptoms that define it, and a child with many of those signs and symptoms can reliably be said to have it.

Among the criteria are a failure to pay attention to details; constant repetition of careless mistakes; an inability to stay focused; not listening when spoken to; a failure to finish schoolwork or home tasks; distractibility; constantly losing books, pencils or other tools; forever leaving the school seat; blurting out answers; and



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nonstop fidgeting. Admittedly, many of those characteristics are characteristics of the average 8-year-old.

Medicines are one approach to treatment. Medicating a young child should make everyone pause. If the parents agree the child has ADHD, if the family doctor or pediatrician concurs, if teachers believe it and if an expert in this field feels that it is the case, then a trial of medicine might be in the child's best interests. ADHD treatment should follow medicine's prime maxim: Above all, do no harm.

**Dear Dr. Donohue:** Last week my urine turned a dark, reddish-brown color. I guess it had blood in it. I had no pain at the time or since, and it has