ADDITUDE ADHD Science & Strategies

AFTERNOONS

How to Survive the After-School Medication Crash

Does your child return home from school mentally exhausted, physically edgy, and starving — all at the same time her ADHD meds are wearing off? Here are ADHD expert Terry Matlen's afternoon meltdown survival strategies for parents and kids.



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When I talk to parents at ADHD conferences, I always say, "See the afternoon crash coming, and have a plan."

We parents know that it is a hair-raising roller-coaster ride from the time kids with attention deficit disorder (ADHD or ADD) get home from school until they go to bed. Three o'clock is probably the toughest time of day for our kids — and the rest of our family.

That shouldn't be surprising. Kids walk through the door mentally exhausted, physically edgy, and starving — though they usually don't realize any of it. What's more, their meds have worn off, causing their ADHD symptoms to return with a vengeance — which means hyperactivity, inattention, and in some cases, earth-shattering meltdowns after school.

My after-school plan was to give my daughter a healthy snack the moment she got home (it actually became an early dinner for her) and to disappear. Anything beyond a simple "Hi" could have triggered a tantrum. She needed to have time to herself.

Here are a few other things that helped reduce the steep drops of the 3 o'clock roller-coaster ride:

[Free Sample Schedule for Building Reliable Routines]

- Don't over-schedule your child with after-school activities. She worked at least twice as hard as her schoolmates without ADHD, and needs about twice as much downtime. We set up a small room in the basement for our daughter, outfitted with beanbag chairs, video games, jigsaw puzzles, and a play table. She isolated herself and played quietly when she was stressed.
- Since moodiness, irritability, anger, and defiance are common in kids who are tired and hungry, don't force your child to accompany you on errands, which will tire her out even more. If you have to go out, be sure to bring in an ADHD-friendly babysitter.
- Set aside time for therapeutic physical activity. Raking the leaves, riding a bike, doing martial arts on Wii, swimming, and taking a walk in the park are effective ways to release tension and hyperactivity.
- Talk with your child's doctor about giving her an afternoon dose of ADHD medication. Many children benefit from a second dose, which helps them focus and stay calm. Remember, no child likes to feel out of

control.

- Watch what your child eats. After-school foods rich in protein will help balance a child's mood better than foods high in simple carbs. Consider an early dinner if she just can't wait for the family meal.
- Hire a tutor or a high school student to help with homework. A non-family member is usually a better homework helper than parents, who may quickly butt heads with their child.
- Be realistic about your expectations and never compare your child to her siblings without ADHD.

[The After-School Homework Routine You Need to Try]

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