

## Competitive swimming and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a developmental disorder, which can cause significant disruption to both children's lives and those around them. The diagnosis is made on clear-cut criteria. These include a short attention span, difficulty in concentrating, disorganised and excessive levels of activity and impulsive behaviour. It tends to run in families and the diagnosis is usually made before the age of seven. It can affect up to 3-5% of all children, with many cases being unrecognised and untreated. Thus, it is quite likely that most swimming clubs have at least one child who needs special help.

Whilst many 'normal' children can, under certain circumstances, show some of these behaviours, it is the severity of the symptoms and their inappropriateness, which help in making the diagnosis. Untreated children with ADHD can fail to reach their potential with underachievement at school and in later life can get into trouble because of anti-social behaviour and delinquency.

ADHD is not due to bad parenting. It is a medical condition, which is treatable with a combination of medication, support and advice and a structured behaviour programme. Usually, specialist doctors based in hospitals manage it. Many children are treated with a drug called Methylphenidate (*Ritalin* or *Concerta*), which can have a marked beneficial effect on the behavioural problems of children with ADHD. Other drugs, which are sometimes used, are Atomoxetine and Dexamfetamine. All these need to be taken regularly for the best effect. It is important to realise that these drugs are banned substances for doping control. All registered, competitive swimmers must notify the A.S.A. to obtain a Therapeutic Use Exemption (T.U.E.) form to prevent a doping violation.

Coaches and helpers should be sympathetic to the needs of these children (and their parents). They should manage them in a fair, firm and consistent way, without discrimination, whilst being aware of the potential for disruptive behaviour. This should enable virtually all children with ADHD to participate in training sessions. Due to their short 'fuse' and attention span, other children can sometimes easily provoke them.

Children with ADHD can excel at competitive swimming and other sports. At least one famous and multiple Olympic swimming champion is said to have suffered from ADHD as a child. The disciplined lifestyle of the competitive swimmer helps provide structure and a focus for their attentions and training programmes can be a useful release for their excess energy.

Additional information and advice for parents, children and teachers is available from the website: [www.livingwithadhd.co.uk](http://www.livingwithadhd.co.uk)