



Friday, March 18, 2005



Ben Turek, a 10th-grader at Chelsea School in Silver Spring, Md., meditates with classmates.

Study: Relaxation Best Medicine

By Rahkia Nance, Examiner Staff Writer

Instead of rushing to pop a pill, children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder should take a 10-minute breather to increase their concentration, an Alexandria researcher says.

Sarina Grosswald, a cognitive learning specialist who has researched the Transcendental Meditation technique, says she found the practice has the same effects as ADHD medication.

The practice involves sitting still with eyes closed for about 10 minutes to 15 minutes twice daily, said Grosswald, director of continuing medical education for the American Medical Women's Association.

"It looks like it does a very similar thing," she said. "If it's possible to get those effects from Transcendental Meditation, that would be a wonderful thing."

Two million children nationwide have ADHD, which is characterized by significant difficulty with sustained attention, impulse control and hyperactivity.

Grosswald conducted a three-month study of 10 students at the Chelsea School in Silver Spring, Md., where the children practiced Transcendental Meditation twice daily for 10 minutes. After meditating, Grosswald found the children were more focused and less impulsive.

To curb ADHD's effects, children are generally prescribed stimulant medicines like Adderall or Concerta, which increase attention and control impulsivity.

The controversy over ADHD medication lies in the number of children prescribed medicines - nearly 2 million - and whether medicine is the best treatment, said Andrew Adesman, chief of developmental and behavioral pediatrics at Schneider Children's Hospital in New Hyde Park, N.Y.

"There's a reluctance or reticence by some people to consider medical treatments for a non-medical disorder," said Adesman, also an associate professor of pediatrics at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. "It's not quite the same thing as urinary tract infection or pneumonia medications."

When a child is affected by ADHD, Grosswald said, there is limited connectivity between the brain's rear and frontal lobe - "the filter for impulsivity."

Transcendental meditation, she found, "enlivened" the communication between the lobes.

Transcendental meditation is not a glorified "quiet time," Grosswald said, and is different from other forms of meditation that focus on concentration and contemplation.

"There are a number of profound changes that take place," she said.

Still, as promising as Grosswald's findings sound, doctors urge parents of children with ADHD to be "discriminating consumers."

"The problem that patients or families have is that there are so many non-medical treatments that are being offered," Adesman said. "Parents are going to have a hard time with which alternative therapy to go."

Parents should research these therapies and "not just embrace what alternative therapy has surface appeal," he said.