

Oming in on ADHD

Transcendental Meditation May Help

By Sarina J. Grosswald, Ed.D.

Your 10-year-old child's teacher says he is having trouble with attention and behavior and insists that you consult a child psychologist for evaluation of ADHD. After a battery of surveys and questionnaires, the psychologist recommends some behavioral approaches and suggests you consider medication. You go with the behavioral approaches, but they don't seem to be working. You're wondering what to do.

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a developmental disorder, is the most common behavioral and psychiatric disorder among children. Children with ADHD have impaired executive functions of the brain, creating difficulty in controlling their attention and behavior. The disorder can have a significant effect on a child's ability to learn and progress in school. And attention deficit often continues into adulthood, causing a lifetime of frustration and difficulty succeeding in the workplace.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 56% of children diagnosed with ADHD are on medication, and many will remain on medication throughout their lives. In making the choice about treatment options, there is much to consider. Behavioral approaches for ADHD are somewhat effective, and the combination of drug treatment and behavioral approaches is more effective than either alone. But medication is often only partially effective, can cause side effects and sometimes even exacerbates or creates new ones. The more you know about ADHD and the effectiveness of treatment options, the more comfortable you can feel about the decisions you make for your child.

How is ADHD Diagnosed?

There is no test for ADHD.

Though the diagnosis is made by a doctor, it is based on subjective information gathered from parents, teachers and the child.



Transcendental Meditation Instruction

Introductory Lecture 1.5 hours
Preparatory Lecture 1.5 hours
Personal Interview 10 minutes
Personal Instruction 2 hours
Verification & Validation 3 days/ 2 hours each day.

The TM technique is practiced twice a day, sitting comfortably with the eyes closed.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, because the diagnosis is based on subjective information rather than an objective diagnostic measurement, a definitive diagnosis can be difficult to make. Children change rapidly. Additionally, at young ages, it is common for children to express signs of impulsiveness, hyperactivity and inattentiveness. What might naturally be immaturity can be mistakenly diagnosed as ADHD, especially in boys.

Are There Non-Drug Options?

Several non-drug options have been suggested, including biofeedback, dietary and nutritional alternatives, acupuncture, etc. While there may be

anecdotal evidence that some of these alternatives work, there is very little scientific data to support the effectiveness of most of these approaches.

However, there is a very simple, natural alternative with a strong scientific basis that can have a profound effect on ADHD. The Transcendental Meditation® (TM) technique is a simple and natural form of meditation that is showing great promise in helping children with ADHD and related disorders such as learning disabilities, Asperger's (or autism) and mood disorders.

There have been more than 600 scientific studies in the past 35 years examining the effectiveness of TM for improving cognitive skills, moral reasoning and behavior, academic performance and stress-related problems. Now groundbreaking research shows its effectiveness specifically with ADHD.

There are many types of meditation and mental techniques, but not all techniques have the same effects. Just as different medicines work differently, different forms of meditation work differently. Only TM has a large body of documented research about brain development and learning, as well as the effects on brain chemistry.

TM doesn't just treat the symptoms, it can actually treat the cause, which means its use doesn't just create a temporary effect but can improve the condition permanently.

ADHD, Brain Chemistry and TM

ADHD is caused by improper levels in the brain of chemicals called neurotransmitters. The medications commonly prescribed for ADHD work by increasing the neurotransmitters in the brain. But these drugs are not a cure.

The amphetamines in the ADHD medication artificially increase the amount of dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain, speeding up the brain (thus the term "speed" for amphetamines). This makes the frontal area of the brain more active. So when the child is on the drug, the communication networks are temporarily improved.

But when the drug wears off, so does the improved brain networking. Not only is the underlying imbalance still there, but it's not uncommon to see a "rebound" effect, aggravating the symptoms when the drug wears off. The child may be "wilder," less focused and even more difficult to control than before the medicine was started.

Research shows that TM naturally creates balance in the brain chemistry, spontaneously improving the symptoms of impulsivity, attention and self-control, by balancing the levels of the neurotransmitters. In other words, TM can create a similar effect in the brain as the common ADHD drugs without the negative side effects.

ADHD medication temporarily manages the symptoms only during the hours the drug is in the system. When the drug wears off, the problem is still there. TM treats the root cause of ADHD, improving brain integration. Additionally, the positive effect continues into daily activity and improvement increases over time.

Can A Child with ADHD Really Meditate?

The TM technique is a specific, unique form of meditation. It is a simple, natural process that allows the mind to settle down to a condition of "restful alertness." As the mind settles down, the body becomes deeply relaxed. As thinking settles down, the mind transcends the busy mental activity and experiences deep silence. Not only does this create a mental quietness that an ADHD child so rarely gets to experience, but it also creates physiological and neuropsychological changes resulting in integration and coherence of brain functioning.

The technique involves no concentration or control of the mind, nor does it involve adopting a philosophy, religion or change of lifestyle. The technique is so simple and effortless that it is easy even for children with ADHD.

How Does TM Improve ADHD?

The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that controls impulsive actions, judgment and social cues. Children and adults suffering from ADHD have impaired function of the prefrontal cortex. This means the communications network that serves as a natural filter for keeping us from acting impulsively or enabling us to focus is not yet fully online.

The effects of TM's "restful alertness" on brain functioning has been documented for 35 years. The research shows that the TM technique creates a more integrated functioning in the frontal areas of the brain. This integrated functioning, in turn, strengthens the circuits, creating better communication from one part of the brain with another and integrating all parts of the brain into a whole.

These physiological changes have not been demonstrated in any other systematic meditation or relaxation technique. Dr. William Stixrud, a clinical neuropsychologist in Silver Spring who specializes in the neuropsychological assessment of children, adolescents and adults with learning, attention and executive, and emotional disorders says, "TM has been shown to improve executive functioning – planning, organizing, regulating emotion and keeping to task. This can be particularly helpful for children with learning disabilities and ADHD."

What Are the Effects of TM on ADHD?

Research on children with ADHD, conducted at the Chelsea School in Silver Spring in 2004, has shown that practicing the TM technique for just a few minutes twice a day: improves attention; improves impulse control; improves problem solving; improves organizational skills; improves academic performance; reduces stress, anxiety and anger.

Children in the study meditated for 10 minutes twice each day at school and at home on weekends and holidays. The effects were clearly evident within just two or three months of TM practice. Unlike ADHD medication, which has no effect after the dose wears off, the brain integration created by TM does not disappear at the conclusion of the 10- to 20-minute TM session. In fact, the orderly brain functioning increases over time. TM programs will start this fall at the Kingsbury School and the Ideal Academy Public Charter School, both in Washington, D.C.

ADHD medication works wonders for some children, works somewhat for others and for some children it does not work at all. TM may be an option to explore if you are deciding whether to start medication or if your child is currently on medication.

How Is TM Learned?

TM is easy for children and adults to learn. It is taught in a Seven-Step course (see side bar). Each step takes about one and a half to two hours.

TM is taught only by highly trained, certified teachers. For the course fee of \$2,500, the child or adult receives personal instruction and lifetime personal follow-up at no additional cost. The course fee is significantly less than common expenditures for an ADHD child, such as the cost of one academic year of tutoring or medication for life. For the one-time fee, there is unlimited follow-up, which

“It’s easier for me to focus and concentrate my energy on one thing, rather than trying to work on one thing, fidgeting, trying to stop that, and trying to listen to the teacher at the same time. Now I can stop and focus on one thing.”

JL - 13-year-old student with ADHD, three months after learning TM

includes services such as refresher courses in instruction, individual checking and verification of the meditation practice, and consultation from any certified TM instructor throughout the practitioner’s life. This support has been available worldwide for almost 50 years and has been utilized by millions of meditators.

Can I Combine TM With Other Treatments?

Research has made it clear that TM is different from other meditation and stress reduction techniques. The success of the TM program in increasing cognitive development is based on much more than simple relaxation. The unique physiological functioning of “restful alertness” created by TM results in documented effectiveness in improving brain functioning that can make a profound difference for an ADHD child.

For many children, TM can potentially reduce the need for other interventions, and for some children may even eliminate the need for any other treatment. When other interventions (medical and behavioral) are needed, TM can be a valuable adjunct, often increasing the effectiveness of other behavior approaches.

Sarina J. Grosswald has a doctorate in education from George Washington University. She is President of SJ Grosswald & Associates, a medical education consulting company. She spearheaded the first re-search on TM and ADHD with Dr. William Stixrud.

**For more information, visit www.tm.org
TM is taught at Maharishi Peace Centers:
Northern Virginia: 703-538-1716
Washington, D.C.: 202-347-8524
Bethesda, Md.: 301-770-5690**

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