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Meditation seen promising as ADHD therapy

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - The practice of Transcendental Meditation may help children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder manage their symptoms, research suggests.

In a pilot study, researchers found that lessons in Transcendental Meditation, or TM, appeared to calm the anxiety of children with ADHD, and improve their behavior and ability to think and concentrate.

TM is considered to be one of the simplest meditation techniques. Practitioners sit comfortably for 10 to 15 minutes with their eyes closed, silently repeating a mantra -- a sound, word or phrase -- to calm the mind and body. Some researchers believe that meditation affects the nervous system in a way that can alter a range of bodily functions, including breathing, blood vessel dilation and stress-hormone regulation.

The current findings indicate that children with ADHD can not only learn the TM technique but also benefit from it, the researchers report in the online journal *Current Issues in Education*.

"The effect was much greater than we expected," lead researcher Sarina J. Grosswald, a cognitive learning specialist in Arlington, Virginia, said in a written statement.

"The children also showed improvements in attention, working memory, organization, and behavior regulation," she added.

The study included 10 children between the ages of 11 and 14 who were attending a school for students with language-related learning disabilities. All had been diagnosed with ADHD and, though most were taking medication, were having problems at school and home.

The students were taught the TM technique and then practiced it at school twice a day, for 10 minutes at a time.

After three months, Grosswald and her colleagues found, the students reported lower stress and anxiety levels, while their ADHD symptoms also improved, based on questionnaires given to teachers and parents.

"Teachers reported they were able to teach more," Grosswald said, "and students were able to learn more because they were less stressed and anxious."

Larger studies, she and her colleagues write, are now needed to see whether TM can be used as an ADHD therapy, either in addition to standard treatment or by itself.

"TM doesn't require concentration, controlling the mind or disciplined focus," Grosswald noted. "The fact that these children are able to do TM, and do it easily shows us that this technique may be particularly well suited for children with ADHD."

SOURCE: *Current Issues in Education*, December 2008.