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Attention Deficit Disorder

Not just a kid problem—what you can do

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Attention Def

It's Not Just a Kid Problem

by KENNETH SILVESTRI, EdD, CCH © 2017

How homeopathy and Coherent Breathing can help

The label “Attention Deficit Disorder” or its newer name “Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder” is being thrown around way too much. Growing numbers of people are being diagnosed with it. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 11% of U.S. children ages 4 to 11 had the diagnosis in 2011—a 42% increase from 8 years earlier—and 6% of all U.S. children were taking medication for it.

Ideally, an ADHD diagnosis for a child should be made by a pediatric health or mental health specialist and only after extensive observation, interviews, and careful evaluation of the child in several environments. In real life, however, this multi-step approach is often sidestepped. Given the very general process that often determines whether a child has ADHD or not, most of our citizens (young and old) could easily fall within its “official” definition.

Here is WebMD’s definition: “ADHD stands for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, a condition with symptoms such as inattentiveness, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. The symptoms differ from person to person. ADHD was formerly called ADD, or attention deficit disorder. Both children and adults can have ADHD, but the symptoms always begin in childhood. Adults with ADHD may have trouble managing time, being organized, setting goals, and holding down a job.”

Labeling can be disabling

Any label, especially if it hints at a deficiency, is scary. If you are a parent or grandparent, you can feel helpless when it has been placed on your child.

Well-intentioned school personnel may be advising you to pursue the quick fix of conventional medication such as the stimulants Ritalin® or Adderall®; however, it is best to stop and pause.* Remember the “name” is not the thing nor is the “map” the territory; don’t get overwhelmed by generalized labels. We are all different; we have our own temperaments and learning styles. Regardless of what the pharmaceutical companies advocate as a solution, there are alternative ways to address the situation. Here are suggestions that will enable you to develop a plan and make a positive difference in your child’s or grandchild’s life if there is a concern about them having attention deficits.

Be mindful & positive

Our attention and concentration depend on our readiness to access the present moment. Get involved with your child or grandchild by participating with them in “mindfulness” exercises, which encourage learning to breathe and focus, as well as relaxation and visualization techniques. In most cases, these practices will result in an increase in a child’s awareness and ability to concentrate. Some helpful

icit Disorder—

books include: *Mind in the Making*, by Ellen Galinsky, *Child's Mind*, by Christopher Willard, *The Mindful Child*, by Susan Kaiser Greenland, and *The Healing Power of the Breath*, by Drs. R. Brown and P. Gerberg.

Don't blindly depend on the "experts." You know your child or grandchild much better than they do. Be positive and think outside the box.

Perhaps the best way to assist is to form a support team for your child. Schools can easily facilitate this, where all those who have a role, be it a teacher, mentor, health care provider, grandparent, or trusted community member, meet and develop a plan with each having clear roles and responsibilities. This also encourages school personnel to be more collaborative with the community and invested in your child's progress, rather than looking to farm out the problem to medical personnel.

Other resources, such as Coherent Breathing and, of course, homeopathy, also have roles to play in successfully addressing deficits in attention. We have everything to gain and nothing to lose by trying a more holistic approach, based on a child's individual needs.

My assessment process

What follows is the framework that I use when assessing someone who comes to me for help with attention deficit issues.



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This can be adapted based on the age and developmental needs of the person involved.

For people of any age seeking help in my practice, my initial question is simply: "What is it that you are not getting in life that causes concern and stops you from being who you want to be?" Next, I ask them to think about this for a minute or so. When they have defined this concern, I suggest that they focus on the consequence of what they are not getting.

At this juncture, I introduce Coherent Breathing with the instructions: "Breathe through the nose, fill up your stomach, and then gradually bring your breath up to your chest to the count of six seconds as you slowly raise your arms above your head. Exhale through your mouth, lips slightly pursed, to the count of six seconds, and then slowly bring your arms down while thinking of something positive during exhalation." I have them continue this for five minutes.

This form of breathing activates the very important vagus nerve, which has been dubbed "the nerve of compassion"

because it regulates not only your metabolism and heart rate but also your emotional wellbeing. Dacher Keltner writes in "The Compassionate Species" (*Greater Good Magazine, Science-Based Insights for a Meaningful Life*, July 31, 2012) that "the vagus nerve is one of the great mind-body nexuses in the human nervous system. Every time you take a deep breath, your heart rate slows down... baseball pitchers do this on the mound—they breathe out to calm down, just before they start their windup. The vagus nerve controls that relationship, between the breathing and the calming."

After the initial breathing exercise, I ask that the person relax their body from head to toe while creating a peripheral view, as if widening the lens of a camera—trying to see beyond the confines of their surroundings. After a short pause, I suggest that they think about what is happening in all aspects of their lives. Kids love this exercise as it breaks the ice and inevitably brings up many personal issues and, in most instances, some humor.

The above sets the framework for homeopathic inquiry, as I then have the person bring their lens back to their original concern and ask how this issue affects them throughout all aspects of their life. What insights, sensations, modalities, and strengths arise in them as they consider their concern from a wider perspective? Widening one's lens gives context and allows for ecological thinking. It also encourages us to see how we are all connected by the energy in our relationships. Widening one's lens also sets the stage for the homeopath to determine the impact of the person's family of origin dynamics as well as the unique and striking symptom patterns that are the basis of homeopathic case taking.

Sharon's story: silliness & self-blame

Sharon, age 15, was referred to me by her school counselor who believed Sharon had ADHD because of a pattern of poor concentration and procrastination. This manifested in her not being able to sit still during class, attracting attention by being "silly," and not having much recall of class topics. This behavior was followed

ADHD: Overdiagnosed & Overtreated?



A post by Drs. Pieter Cohen, Michael Hochman, and Rachael Bedard in the Harvard Health Blog on March 16, 2017, "Is ADHD overdiagnosed and overtreated?" reviews a new book by *New York Times* journalist Alan Schwarz — *ADHD Nation: Children, Doctors, Big Pharma, and the Making of an American Epidemic*. The author has spent years investigating the link between the pharmaceutical industry and the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD. The Harvard doctors say: "He investigates pharmaceutical companies' collaboration with leading academic experts and celebrities ... combined with aggressive direct-to-consumer advertising campaigns to boost recognition of and pharmacotherapy for the condition." They conclude: "What he helps us understand is the forces that have led clinicians to misdiagnose millions of children with the disease and, far too often, to prescribe stimulants

that expose children to more harm than good."

www.health.harvard.edu/blog/is-adhd-overdiagnosed-and-overtreated-2017031611304

by remorse, self-blame, and sadness. Sharon had an older sister away at college who was a high achiever, as were her two parents.

When I asked Sharon what concerned her most in her life, she told me it was the feeling of not being worthy. When I asked her to tell me about the consequence of this, she said that she could not get higher grades and that she disappointed her parents. Sharon said her nightly dreams were full of doubting herself.

After I led Sharon through some Coherent Breathing, she quickly shared with me her sense of low self-esteem and fear of failure. She also articulated how she compensated by acting “foolish.” Although I could see that her humor was very creative, I noticed that she tended to lose her focus when describing events. Sharon was a “feeling” person who had compassion and empathy toward others. She had memories of being made fun of when she was younger on the school playground, and she reported a feeling of being trapped. She said that she seldom would share her feelings with others. Sharon showed a significant sense of responsibility, wanting to be on time and do the correct thing despite her difficulties with concentration and focus.

Some of her modalities from a homeopathic perspective were being very thirsty, feeling worse with heat and from being in the sun, and feeling better from dancing. Sharon described bouts of eczema on her arms, which had started two years earlier and which seemed to get worse with heat and anxiety. She also had headaches above her eyes during her menstrual period.

Choosing a remedy

After repertorizing her symptoms, the remedy I suggested for Sharon was *Natrum muriaticum* 6c liquid to be taken twice a day for ten days.** I asked her to continue the Coherent Breathing after each dose for five minutes and to record her feelings.

I chose *Natrum muriaticum* based on Sharon’s temperament as a feeling person with a presenting layer of anxiety. She was reserved, had a sense of grief about her situation, and wanted to be perfect,

which pointed to *Natrum muriaticum*. Her tendencies towards self-reproach, foolish behavior, fear of failure, and feeling trapped also pointed to this remedy. Her loss of focus when talking and vacant feeling when attempting to concentrate are unique to *Natrum muriaticum*.

In deciding on a remedy for Sharon, I also considered *Sepia* because of her temperament, low self-esteem, headaches, eczema, and improvement with dancing. However, Sharon did not have the irritability and guilt issues that someone needing *Sepia* might be expected to manifest. I also considered the remedy *Silica* because of Sharon’s sense of needing to be perfect, sensitivity, yielding nature, and low self-esteem, but Sharon had much stamina and perseverance regarding her convictions and desires, unlike someone needing *Silica*.

People who benefit from *Natrum muriaticum*, according to Luc De Schepper in his *Discovering Life: Homeopathic Portraits*, have the feeling of “not belonging,” yet they are always smiling even with much sadness, and they know that they are stuck or trapped. Sharon was also very self-protective and articulated a sense of having been betrayed, which fit Ananda Zaren’s description of people needing *Natrum muriaticum* in her *Materia Medica*, Vol. 2, “They prefer to remain alone—as though they were waiting for the ax to fall.”

Slow, steady upswing

During a follow-up appointment six weeks later, Sharon reported that her eczema, which she’d had since starting high school two years earlier, had almost subsided. And she had only experienced slight headaches during her recent menstrual period. She described a slow but definite improvement in her self-confidence and emotional attitude, and she was putting less pressure on herself regarding grades; that is, she was motivated to get better grades, but her self-esteem wasn’t completely crushed if she didn’t make the mark. Her school counselor, who I had a release to talk with, confirmed that Sharon’s school behavior was improving, too.

I continued to meet with Sharon four times monthly. We worked on commu-

Just one year earlier, going to college had seemed like an unlikely prospect for Sharon...

On Being Mindful

The main tenet of being mindful is to pause and focus while viewing the world as a part-to-whole interconnected process. The consequence of not recognizing our mutual interdependence with nature and others can and has led to stress, which is linked to a compromised immune system and other health threats. Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk who helped popularize the practice of Mindfulness, urges us: “To be fully alive, to be mindful you need a beginner’s mind.” Or as Shunryu Suzuki asserts in his classic *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind* (Shambhala Publications: New York, 1970): “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s, there are few.”

Through being at the beginning, we can form an attitude that emphasizes strong confidence in our original nature. “If you fix your mind on the activity with some confidence, the quality of your state of mind is the activity itself.”



nication skills and stress management using Coherent Breathing, some Qigong movements, and meditation. We also discussed her school and social experiences. She was progressively more open and seemed to be feeling less lonely and more focused.

We also had one family session to see how relationships were at home. It was apparent to me that her parents were quite concerned about Sharon yet very supportive of her.

After three months, Sharon had improved considerably. Because she was still exhibiting symptoms, however, I suggested that she now take *Natrum muriaticum* in the 12c liquid potency, once a day for 10 days.

In a follow-up individual session about six weeks later, Sharon said she still had moments of self-doubt but she showed much more ease and acceptance in her

life. Because she was doing so well, I now recommended that she take *Natrum muriaticum* in the 30c liquid potency—but only as needed.

Improved health, behavior, outlook

Approximately six months from the initial assessment, we had another family session. Sharon's mother said there was less tension at home and that Sharon was much more attentive and focused during conversations. Sharon reported that she no longer had any eczema issues or headaches. She said that in recent months, she had needed to take a dose of *Natrum muriaticum* 30c only on occasion, when feeling that she might be regressing emotionally.

Sharon's school counselor, in a discussion with me prior to the family meeting, reported that she was pleasantly surprised at the significant progress that Sharon had made in six months; Sharon was obviously more focused on her schoolwork and did not exhibit the distracted and distracting behavior that had initially led to the referral. The counselor added that Sharon had made wonderful progress relating to classmates.

Given this marked improvement, Sharon appeared to be responding well to

treatment. I suggested that she continue to practice Coherent Breathing on a regular basis and to take a dose of *Natrum muriaticum* 30c, only as needed.

Focused on the future

About a year after our first visit, Sharon came to see me to discuss college choices. Just one year earlier, going to college had seemed like an unlikely prospect for Sharon, but now that she was so much better at focusing and at school work, she was more confident in her ability to succeed. Her concentration difficulties had subsided, and she had pulled her grades up without the pressures and concerns of the past. She showed little distraction when we spoke—which was very different from our initial interactions. She explained that while she still had moments when she doubted herself, she was able to resolve those feelings quickly. She still carried her bottle of *Natrum muriaticum* 30c with her but seldom had to use it.

Individualized approach

I have worked successfully with hundreds of people with attention and concentration difficulties in my practice for over 30 years, and I have never prescribed or created a plan based on a label or

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Coherent Breathing was developed by Stephen Elliott and involves five breaths per minute as compared to the average 15 breaths that we usually take (inhaling through the nose to a count of 6, then exhaling through pursed lips to a count of 6). I suggest adding a simple Qigong movement of slowly raising one's arms in synchrony to the breathing pattern. Qigong is an ancient Chinese system of physical exercises and breathing skills, and when used with Coherent Breathing, it augments the activation of the Parasympathetic (calm part) and Sympathetic (revved up part) of your nervous system to be more in

harmony. Research on Coherent Breathing clearly supports that this breathing pattern helps alleviate symptoms such as anxiety, ADHD, depression, and trauma. Coherent Breathing enhances awareness of your environment and stimulates the release of oxytocin, which is known as "the cuddle hormone," something we can always use. Coherent Breathing also complements and supports the use of homeopathy by strengthening the immune system.

For more information, see www.coherentbreathing.org and www.coherence.com.

Breathe for Ease!



All in our society will benefit in the long run by addressing the needs of our youth systemically, and who amongst us is not concerned about them and their future?

one symptom. Given the individualized approach of homeopathy and my background as a systemic psychotherapist, each person's case has been resolved with different homeopathic remedies and other resources, based on the presenting context, the person's temperament, and other existing symptoms and modalities. I have found that it is always best to look for the totality of symptoms that exist for that person at the time of the assessment.

I've also found that when people learn and practice complementary skills such as Coherent Breathing, Qigong, and other mind/body techniques, the energy inherent in homeopathy can better balance the person's immune system. In most cases, these skills have become an integral part of the lives of those I have worked with, as many have reported back to me over the years.

Full stop... and go

I recently was pulled over by a police officer for not coming to a full stop. When he looked at my license and registration, he shut off his two-way radio, looked me in the eye and said, "Hey Dr. Ken, don't you recognize me? You helped me when I was 14 years old when I was a mess at school... and please be mindful and come to a full stop next time!"

All in our society will benefit in the long run by addressing the needs of our youth systemically, and who amongst us is not concerned about them and their future? In this seeming "epidemic" of Attention Deficit Disorder (which may only be the tip of the iceberg), you, whether a parent or a concerned citizen, will be helping your loved one, yourself, and others through your involvement with our youth and their personal issues. This is an opportunity to embark on a possibly life-changing journey—with the bonus that you can have some fun sharing and participating in some healthy skills such as Coherent Breathing—and

yes, of course, being mindfully aware to stop at all stop signs!

* The most widely used medications for ADHD are stimulants, such as the amphetamine Adderall® and the methylphenidates Ritalin® and Concerta®. These fast-acting drugs can increase a person's ability to focus, thereby improving how they function in school or daily life; however, the drugs only manage ADHD symptoms and do not cure them. Furthermore, side effects are very common and include sleep problems, decreased appetite, weight loss, stomachache, irritability, and jitteriness. Less common side effects include suicidal thinking and heart problems. Given these risks, it's good to know there are other, more holistic ways to address attention deficit issues, especially for our children.

** I typically ask patients to order the homeopathic remedy in a liquid form and then give them instructions on how to take it, depending on their individual sensitivity, condition, etc. In Sharon's case, I suggested she success the bottle (by hitting it against her palm) eight times; then place one teaspoon from the bottle into 4 ounces of spring or filtered water, stir, and take one teaspoon from this dilution by mouth, as one dose. Successing the bottle before each dose will slightly increase the potency of the remedy. I learned this dosing method from my teachers David Little and Dr. Luc De Schepper, according to Hahnemann in his 6th edition of the *Organon*.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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