

## ADHD & Neurofeedback

Many parents do not like the idea of putting their children on medication to treat ADHD. All drugs have side effects. And side effects encompass those that are currently known plus those that remain to be discovered in years to come. There is also a concern, or dislike, about 'having to take medicine for the rest of one's life.' And then there is the cost of medication, which has exploded in recent years, so that a single prescription can now cost several hundred dollars, which is more likely if your insurance plan has a high deductible, or otherwise does not offer good coverage for medication expenses.

I have been doing neurofeedback training on ADHD kids and adults for over thirteen years. The most common refrain I've heard in that time from individuals in my office is 'I've tried everything to get my child to pay attention and learn better: tutoring, rewards, punishment, a new school, more time spent on homework at night... nothing works. And now they're on meds and I don't like it!'"

The other issue over these decades has been that recommending a treatment for ADHD involved 'You can choose any color, as long as it's black.' Meaning, there are all sorts of alternative approaches to treating it, such as reducing sugar in the diet, or acupuncture, or nutritional supplements. But all are considered experimental, and none have been shown to be as effective much less more effective than meds. And so meds were it.

There is now an alternative approach involving what is called neurofeedback, or EEG biofeedback. It entails using an EEG machine with electrodes placed on the scalp, and giving feedback of the brain's electrical activity through an audio speaker. The person being trained does not have to do much of anything, other than sit and relax, and follow simple instructions offered by the neurotherapist running the machine.

Research is finding that neurofeedback can be quite effective for reducing the symptoms of medically diagnosed ADHD. The American Academy of Pediatrics said in 2012 that neurofeedback is a 'level 1' (meaning having the best evidence) treatment approach for ADHD, which makes it equal in effectiveness to medications. Another factor in its favor is neurofeedback may also have beneficial effects on other symptoms of ADHD, such as social difficulties that medication does not necessarily help. And research has shown that the effects of neurofeedback appear to 'stick' for 1-10 years at least after treatment has ended. Moreover, the effects may actually *increase* after the training has ended.

Overall, neurofeedback may be considered as an alternative approach to treating ADHD. Or, it might be considered when someone does not want to take meds, drug trials have not been successful, such as from side effects being too great, or they have lost their effectiveness over time.



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