Understanding How Neurofeedback Could Benefit Those With ADHD

by MITZI MACBAIN

Neurofeedback for ADHD

I was very excited when a local TV station had a short segment about Adults and ADHD. They interviewed a woman I know who does life coaching and testing for adults. They also interviewed another man who runs a successful business with ADHD. He talked about how he copes and uses different methods to keep track of things.

The only mention for treatment for ADHD was medication and diet. I sat there thinking, “what about neurofeedback?” I emailed the TV anchorwoman right after the broadcast to find out if she would do a follow-up story about treating ADHD with neurofeedback. I mentioned it would be helpful if she could interview my clinician, who is an LCSW, and has been using neurofeedback in her private practice for the past five years. She uses it for her clients with issues of addiction, ADHD, anxiety, depression, head injuries, migraines, PTSD, and strokes. I was pleasantly surprised when she wrote me back a few hours later and said she was interested in following up with both of us in the near future.

I happened to be booked for a NF treatment the following day and eagerly told my clinician. She, yet again, reminded me that just because I had such a great response to NF treatment not everyone does. She actually thinks it is the combination of psychotherapy, CBT, *and* neurofeedback that makes the most impact on healing.

I sat there and thought about it. I have been seeing her for 2 years. We do start each session with basically a therapy session. I tell her what is going on in my life, she counsels me a bit, sometimes giving me advice or feedback, and then I have a 30 minute session of neurofeedback.

What is Neurofeedback?

In a nutshell, during neurofeedback you sit and play video games – no hands, just eyes – and/or watch documentaries, while electrodes are attached to your scalp. It is simple, painless, and, in my opinion, effortless.

The clinician watches your brain activity as you focus on the games or videos and lets you know what's happening. The idea is to train the brain to stay more active and focused, and to function more efficiently.

Next page: the positives and the negatives.

The Positives

The positives that I have experienced from NF treatment are:

- Complete remission of anxiety, except for two brief bouts last year when my stepmother and beloved cat died. I had one treatment of NF each time and the anxiety has been gone again for 14 months.

- No more major depression, although I have had some situational depression this year with the loss of two teeth and breakage of more. I quantify major depression as feeling like you are wearing a thick black wool cloak at all times, where situational depression is more like a lightweight fleece jacket.
- Deep restorative sleep. Before treatment I was a napper, taking melatonin or allergy meds for 30 solid years to fall asleep, then only sleeping three to four hours at a time and never feeling fully rested in the morning.
- No more issues with rage. I used to fly into a rage over anything, especially memories of abuse from childhood.
- No more overreacting and lashing out at people. Now I pause and think before I say or do anything
- No more talking fast, moving at the cruising speed of jetliners, and no more chronic repetitive negative thinking.

The Negatives

I can’t think of a single reason to not try neurofeedback. I knew on my first session that I had found something extraordinary. As I sat there and became deeply relaxed during the NF session, it felt like someone was literally massaging my brain. (For a visual, I sat reclined in a Lazyboy with electrodes attached to my scalp, which I didn’t feel, watching a video on TV with headphones on).

Now, I have had full body massages and they are pretty relaxing, but that is nothing in comparison to feeling like someone is massaging your brain. I think when you run on a non-stop motor until you are 49, and have no ability on your own to truly relax; this treatment is a Godsend. Before, I felt like a prisoner in my body. I had no control over my thoughts, words, actions or body. I feel like I have been paroled, and I am very grateful.

Conclusions

I have to admit that I did have pretty good results when I first started ADHD treatment with medication, change in my diet, vitamin and mineral supplements, and exercise. All those things did really well to treat my symptoms. I just found it a bit depressing at night when the Ritalin was completely out of my body right before bed and I felt the return of some low grade symptoms. It made me sad.

I think the best thing about neurofeedback to me is that it did what medication did, but the results are deeper and more permanent. My brain found a way to reset itself. I find that fascinating. It's like when I was a kid and the chain on my bike would come off, and it would difficult to pedal. My brain gets off track, and neurofeedback helps it to find the right grooves again, and to run more smoothly. It is the best thing I have ever done.