

## The brain under siege

by Lee Gerdes

Young people everywhere are being diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. In the United States, eight percent of children ages four through 17 are diagnosed with ADHD. Among adults, the percentage is between 2.9 and 4.4. However, it is believed that only a third to as much as a fifth of cases of ADHD are diagnosed. This wasn't the case just a couple of generations ago. Why is attention deficit so prevalent today?

The input our brain receives has increased dramatically over the last 50 years. We are at a point where we are inundated with information and stimulation. Not only do thousands of bits of information flood into the brain from the natural world and our exchanges with other people every single second of a normal day, but to these we have added a vast input from technology. Think how much more challenging it is to drive in a modern city, with dense traffic, traffic signals and signs, pedestrians and cyclists, billboards everywhere, and all the hustle and bustle of city streets and storefronts, compared with riding a horse or driving a carriage down a peaceful country lane.

Some researchers suggest the input the modern brain receives may have risen as much as a thousand-fold during the last half-century alone. So every second of every day, we are receiving a thousand times more input than were our grandparents. Even if this figure were only a hundredfold, it's still a huge increase in the input the brain has to cope with. It's not difficult to understand how a child's attention slips into deficit under such an onslaught.

When a child has ADHD, the prevailing wisdom is to medicate the brain with a stimulant. This increases the higher frequencies used for thinking, which overcomes the lower frequencies. However, increasing the higher frequencies with a stimulant causes the brain to become dependent on a chemical whenever it requires higher frequencies. Consequently, many who are medicated become addicted by the time they are 18.

Alongside the vastly increased input the brain receives in a technological society, such a society also generates a great deal of busyness, which in itself can be a cause of imbalance. But it isn't only the way automobiles, trains and planes allow us to rush around at a helter-skelter pace – and the telephone calls, emails, video conferences and faxes that keep us interacting – that creates imbalance. We also wear ourselves out with all the pressure to perform that's placed on us in this kind of society. Instead of increasing our effectiveness, such pressure actually impairs our performance.

Take the matter of making decisions. In a culture in which we are so pressed for time, it's easy to fall into a habit of making decisions without the thorough attention each should receive. The trouble is that if we do this often, the low brain frequencies involved in such a decision take over as executive manager – a role they aren't equipped to fulfill. Pretty soon, all our decisions circumvent logic and are executed from a "feel good" or "look good" mindset. Because this approach is hit-and-miss, it's hard to consistently make the best decisions this way.



Living in a technologically complex world, being busy almost all the time and feeling pressure to perform lower the energy reservoirs of the brain. If there's little reserve of energy, a brain running at high speed will crash once its energy is depleted. This is similar to running so hard in a race that you run out of steam before the finish line.

Even when our brain is attempting to perform at its peak,

its state of imbalance causes it to be far too busy to allow information to flow freely. In western society, it's likely that most who meditate aren't able to spend sufficient time in meditation to achieve the kind of balance that facilitates maximum flow of information. We don't become balanced enough because the chemical factory keeps pumping juices into the brain to generate activity – a function demanded by the brain activity itself, and hence a Catch 22.

When a person operates from this state, they don't sleep well. Consequently, when they awaken, they experience a slow start. They may have to drink coffee to get themselves going because coffee causes the blood vessels to constrict, which creates pressure. So now they start the pump again, running and running and running, until they crash again. If a person continually repeats this cycle, they eventually become so tightly wound that they have to reach for a glass of wine or some other drug to unwind.

Living under pressure causes no small number of us to feel continually on edge, which means we become easily angered. If we were to take an assessment of the brain of a person who feels this way, it would reveal they have a high-frequency dominance in a specific location compared with other frequencies in that area. A person with such a dominance is usually sufficiently volatile to have anger management problems. We say such a person has a potential violent streak in them and is quick on the trigger. Yet it isn't the high-frequency dominance that's the real danger; it's that the person's brain runs in this state all the time. When someone is at rest, their high frequencies ought not to be dominant.

When the brain isn't balanced and is firing too fast, it burns out sooner, which is eventually reflected in an impaired body. Also, with the brain so overactive almost all the time, a high degree of happiness is unlikely. Not impossible, but unlikely.

### Running ahead of our evolution

Over eons of time, the brain has evolved filters that allow us to select which information from our environment will receive our attention. These filters enable us to concentrate on just a small portion of the available input, screening out the rest.

However, in our technological era, we suffer such an onslaught of information that it completely overwhelms the brain's filtering capability. Because these new forms of input have been thrust upon us almost overnight, we have had no opportunity to evolve more advanced filters. In other words, the evolution of society has moved faster than the evolution of the person.

As a result, we are at the point in our journey as a species where a growing number of people on the planet experience an imbalance early in life – an imbalance that's socially and technologically generated. Living in such a technologically complex society, we experience so much stress that our brain tends to run continually at a level of energy that's far too high, a level that should be reserved for moments requiring peak performance.

Although we have become accustomed to living in a constant state of stress from the extraneous input we receive in our kind of society, much of the time the brain doesn't need the throttle to be wide open. A balanced brain uses energy efficiently, which produces a harmonious result.

The brain's natural state is to be in homeostasis and most of us are fortunate to begin life with a reasonably balanced brain. This state of homeostasis is the basis of health, happiness, creativity, and most importantly, love. It's the key to being able to be truly present in every aspect of our lives.

Using this platform of awareness, a person can establish lifestyle patterns that act as filters, thereby protecting the brain to some degree. For instance, a person whose brain is balanced – and who is therefore very present – will intuitively tend to seek out quiet times, peaceful situations and the stillness of nature, all of which allow the brain a respite.

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