

**ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDERS
&
THE TOMATIS METHOD**

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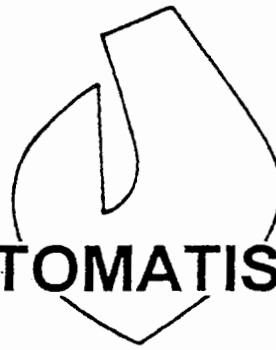
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THE ENIGMA OF ADD

These days, everyone seems to be talking about Attention Deficit Disorders, ADD in short. Books, TV shows and newspaper articles have familiarized millions of people with the ADD syndrome. But what is ADD? What causes ADD, and most importantly, what can be done to help people with ADD?

There are many types of ADD, but in general, an ADD person is easily distracted, very impulsive and restless. But not all ADD persons are restless. Some tend to be very quiet: they are simply "not there."

A review of the scientific literature shows that ADD is hotly debated among experts. Some go as far as saying that the ADD syndrome lacks supportive evidence and should be clinically discarded (G. Coles, L. Fleisher, and P. Breggin). Others believe that ADD is a neurological syndrome whose cause might be genetic (Hallowell and Ratey). However, they admit that *"the exact mechanism underlying ADD remains unknown. There is no single lesion of the brain, no single neurotransmitter system, no single gene we have identified that triggers ADD."* Running

counter to the neuro-biological explanation is the fact that ADD is diagnosed ten times more often in America than in Europe, and that the Japanese report very few cases of ADD. So, ADD is a riddle far from being solved. But while it is important to know the origin of ADD, more important is to know what can be done about it.

SENSORY INTEGRATION AND ADD

Little attention has been given to the possibility that a lack of sensory integration might play a role in ADD. Jean Ayres, the pioneer of sensory integration, pointed out that poor sensory integration can lead to both hyperactivity and poor attention. She concluded that these problems arise when the vestibule, located in the inner ear, does not function well: *"A well-modulated vestibular activity is very important for maintaining a calm, alert state. The vestibular system also helps keep the level of arousal of the nervous system balanced. An under-active vestibular system contributes to hyperactivity and distractibility because of the lack of its modulating influence."*

So, what happens if the vestibule cannot integrate the sensory information well? There are possibilities: either the vestibule is overloaded by

needed something. Academically, he was way behind in writing and reading. He was not an unpleasant child, but the frustration he experienced at school was turning him into a bully. He was emotionally very immature and was short-fused. His parents were trying hard to keep him on track at school, but he would forget to do his homework or to turn it in. By the end of the day, he would not even remember what he had done at school. Tom now was eight and his parents were at their wit's end. They decided to give the *Tomatis* method a try.

We explained to Tom's parents that they shouldn't expect an overnight miracle and that it would take some time before we could see the first results. They should look for "windows of attention" that might be a little bit longer than usual and possibly some changes in Tom's behavior.

Tom started to come to the Center, two hours per day. He got a special headphone which was connected to the *Electronic Ear*. He did not have to listen to the "music" but could play alone or with the other kids. By the end of the first fifteen days, the parents reported that there had been some moments when they felt Tom had been able to pay more attention. He had focused on a book throughout the weekend and had turned in the assignment on time. He also seemed to follow the rules in the house somewhat better .

After the first fifteen days, there was a scheduled break. When they came back three weeks later, both parents reported that Tom's attention seemed

better. They had been surprised that Tom had done some work on his own at school. He remembered the rules more consistently. He was experimenting with cursive, a first for him. His father noted that he was more able to express his feelings and that they have had some surprising discussions. They started the second phase, a block of eight days. By the end, his mother said that he was listening more often. *"He is*

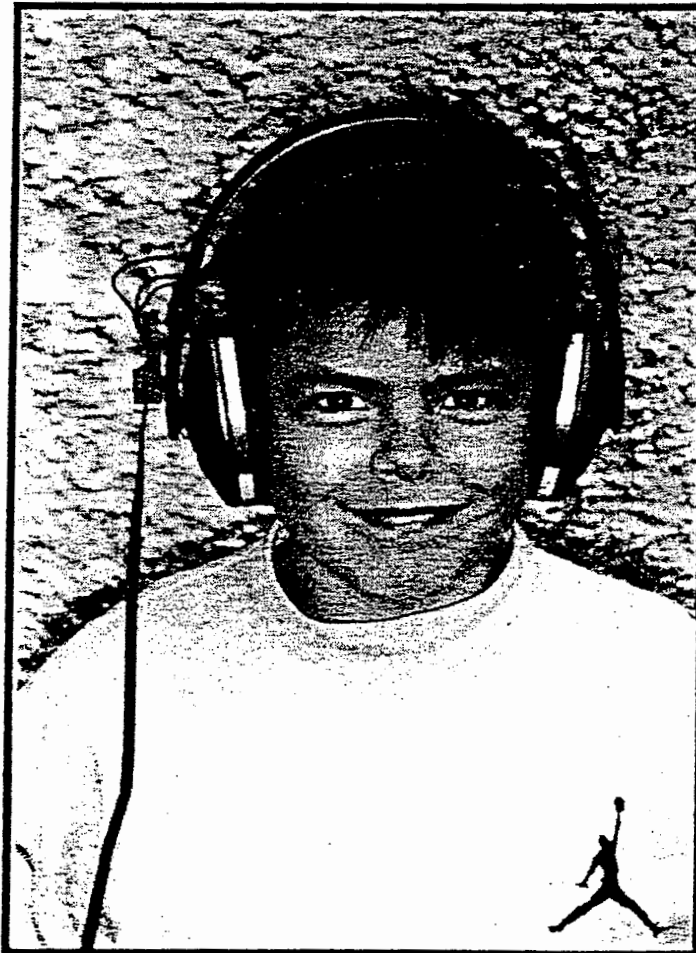
computing what I am saying." He was doing better in baseball, a sign that sensory-integration was improving. Finally, at the dinner table, he would tell in lengthy detail his day at school.

The breakthrough came a few weeks later when his mother found Tom doing his homework on his own, at seven o'clock in the morning. She stopped by the Center to tell me triumphantly: *"My son finally awoke."*

After a month's interval he came back for a third block of eight days. Tom continued to progress. He developed a better image of himself and was more confident. He not only improved a lot in baseball

but also at school. The teacher told him: *"Tom, you have matured so much! You are not silly anymore!"* The parents were delighted by his "awakening." *"He is with us now."*

Still, Tom needed to catch up at school. Summer was coming and we thought that he could use some of the time to study with a private tutor. Now Tom was ready. He could focus his attention, he was able to perceive sounds and



too much information; or it doesn't process enough information and the brain is deprived of the stimulation it needs to function optimally. In both cases, there is poor sensory-integration.

There are several ways to deal with poor sensory integration. We can try to "tune out" the source of those unbearable stimulations, to calm things down. In this case, we would be diagnosed with attention deficit. The other way to make up for the lack of stimulations is to stirr things up, mainly through body movements. In this case we would be diagnosed with hyperactivity. The great number of mixed diagnosis lead to the conclusion that actually both can happen alternatively.

LISTENING AND ADD

The theories of Jean Ayres suggest that one could overcome ADD by retraining the vestibular system. That is exactly what the *Tomatis* method does. The French physician, Dr. Alfred A. Tomatis, started his ground breaking work on auditory processing some 40 years ago and thousands of people with ADD have since benefited from the *Tomatis* Method.

In Tomatis' view, improving listening skills is a priority in the treatment of ADD. As a matter of fact, ADD children or adults are often accused of not listening. Tomatis, however, draws a sharp distinction between hearing and listening. We can hear well and still be poor listeners. Listening involves the ability and the desire to both **tune in** to the information provided by our environment, as well as to **filter out** unwanted information. ADD children or adults are unable to sort out, classify and organize the information. Each new stimulus requires their attention but doesn't get it because they already need to attend to a new one. In a way, they are extremely attentive, too attentive but get lost because there is no barrier to protect them against this continuing bombardment. And so they tune out, stop listening to this on-going flow of information that they can't organize. So, to listen well, one has to be able to

both tune in and to filter out information; said in other words, to smoothly integrate sensory input.

Starting to really listen is not without risk for a person with ADD. Day by day they are bombarded by too much stimulation for them to handle and they therefore experience the world as an unsafe place. They retreat in themselves or in a little bubble, somewhere "out there," where they don't feel threatened. The "space cadet" is an example in point. But when they start to listen, they need to re-enter the world and need to overcome their fears. Tomatis points out that those fears need to be alleviated before they can re-enter into the world and start functioning normally.

Tomatis has developed a therapy that addresses both the need to strengthen the sensory-integration systems and the need to resolve the emotional issues. To achieve those goals, the *Tomatis* Method uses an electronic device called the *Electronic Ear*. Through sound stimulation, it regulates the vestibular function and helps the ADD child or adult to respond in a more adaptive way to the environment. It also enhances the cognitive abilities by making it possible to focus on sounds without being distracted. This is important because many people with ADD have some sort of learning difficulties. When needed, counseling sessions are added to maximize progress and to promote new strategies of living.

To show how the *Tomatis* Method works, we will now focus on two cases: an eight-year old boy and a thirty-five year old man.

AN ADD CHILD: TOM'S STORY

When Tom came for the first time to the Lafayette *Tomatis* Center, he had all the signs of an ADD child. He was fidgeting in his chair, interrupted the discussion with his parents by irrelevant questions and throughout the evaluation was unable to focus on what he was asked to do. His parents felt that "*he had never awakened,*" but was lost in his own world, only reaching out when he

reproduce them. His progress in reading, writing and math were very fast. To help him, he also got a "booster" at the *Tomatis* Center. When school started again, he was ready.

A few weeks later, the whole family stopped by the Center. They were quite happy. Academically, Tom was a different child. The teacher felt that he had almost caught up and that he was now operating closer to his age-level. For the parents, their dream to have a "normal child" had been realized. Was still Tom an ADD child? The question had no meaning for them anymore. Tom was "awake" and doing well.

AN ADD ADULT: JEFF'S STORY

As recent studies show, ADD can affect adults too. 35-year old Jeff is a good example. Although he was never formally diagnosed as ADD, Jeff presented many of the signs of ADD. His lack of focus, his forgetfulness about ordinary things, his inability to organize the tasks at hand, affected his daily life. He could not easily learn new things at work, got easily lost when driving and was mildly learning disabled. A hearing test showed that Jeff had "*an entirely normal hearing sensitivity*" but had "*a central auditory processing deficit characterized by difficulty in focusing his listening when there is a competing signal or background noise.*" This accounted for Jeff's difficulties in learning and remembering. Jeff used memory lists (but lost them, or forgot that they were in his pocket) and used a calculator / memory watch for day, date and phone numbers. He reported that he was easily distracted by cars passing by and by "feelings" within himself as well. **Distraction** was the key word to sum up Jeff's behavior.

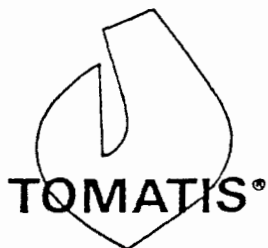
When Jeff came back for his second block of therapy, he reported spontaneously that things were getting better. He didn't need to look at his watch to know what day it was, nor make a list to go grocery shopping. He didn't feel distracted anymore by sounds around him. "*I don't have to pay attention to them. It is like a filter. I can hear, I can see, but I don't get easily distracted.*" He felt better about himself and felt much calmer, which helped him, he believed, to pay better attention. Jeff now had hope that his life would be less dysfunctional and I could tell already that the therapy was making a difference in his life

Since then, Jeff has made steady progress. Towards the end of his treatment at the Center, he lost his job. He handled it very calmly, which impressed his parents, who thought that he would be crushed by the news. Jeff found a new job and felt very pleased with himself. But for him, the most important thing was that now, "*When I wake up, I know where I am and which day it is. I can speak my mind. I don't get so easily distracted.*"

The *Tomatis* Method is really about listening, paying attention, reconnecting with oneself and the environment. It is a gentle, safe, non-intrusive therapy. It has proven a powerful tool to help ADD children and adults treated in over 200 centers around the world. Please call the *Tomatis* Center for more information.

Pierre Sollier

Pierre Sollier, the author of this article, is director of the Lafayette (CA) *Tomatis* Center. He is a licensed Marriage, Family and Child Counselor, and was trained directly by Dr. Tomatis in France.



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