

Is medication the only option?

When feeling low, anxious, too wired to sleep, too stressed to function or concentrate, many people tend to drink pills to overcome those negative symptoms. In South Africa we used to be a nation that likes quick fixes and takes medication readily. Luckily this is changing and more and more people are conscious of what the negatives are of medication and how many side effects they can cause. Medication has its place but can also create more symptoms than many people are aware of. It is always advisable to read the leaflet and inform yourself about what you are taking. I see more and more clients who have severe side effects from medication or who do not want to take medication and would like to heal their mind, brain and body with help of more natural therapies. Fortunately science has progressed incredibly and there are different options out there that have been proven to work successfully.

When thinking of psychological symptoms a very successful treatment option is neurofeedback, counseling and hypnotherapy. People can change drastically and are often surprised how good they feel after the treatment sessions.

In cases of children not being able to concentrate, many studies found that neurofeedback can have a significantly positive effect on changing the brain to function optimally and are comparable to children who do not have concentration problems. As Nina, 15 states: "I can feel a big difference from the time I came for neurofeedback training to now. Before the sessions I felt anxious and couldn't sleep well. I used to drift off in school and daydream a lot. When I had to write exams I wasn't motivated to study, left everything for the last minute, couldn't cram everything into my brain and felt very stressed when having to write my exam. I felt so despondent and thought I was a failure and stupid. I was put on Ritalin but the medication gave me headaches, stomach cramps, made my sleep even worse and I felt jittery. I didn't want to take medication any more because the side effects were not great at all. The neurofeedback sessions helped me to gain confidence and feel uplifted. I also started to concentrate better and was motivated to study. My marks improved by up to 25%. It is such a great feeling to cope better in school."

As S.Othmer, PHD, states that Neurofeedback can change the brain for clients with ADD/ADHD, depression, anxiety, sleep and memory problems. Neurofeedback is around since 1960 and has proven to be extremely beneficial over the last decades as more about the brain has been researched and people are using this therapy to improve their mental functioning. Many centers in the world specialize in this type of brain training with amazing results. In those centers, practitioners see clients coming in to train their brains as we see people going to fitness centers to train their bodies. Brain training is the preferred training for anyone who wants to function well. Lee-Ann, 43 says: "It was strange in the beginning because the practitioner puts sensors on your head and measures the brainwaves on all the different EEG points of the brain. I didn't feel anything, it was like taking a photo of my brain. After the assessment I found it was very interesting to hear what the readings meant and I could see how stressed my brain really is. No wonder that I couldn't sleep and remember names

well. During the day I often felt as if my brain was fogged up. In the sessions the sensors were placed on those points to change the fast brainwave so that the brain could function in a calmer, more optimal way. Apart from the sensors stimulating the brain to change, I had to watch different programs on a computer screen for optimal feedback for the brain. I had to manage to keep the screen running smoothly for perfect brain functioning, it was like playing a computer game with the brain. Over time, I noticed that I was much calmer, could switch my brain off at night, sleep better and remember other people's names and things I read and heard. Even my family noticed that my memory improved and I didn't have to constantly apologize because of my bad memory. I feel that I changed a lot. I am more content, happier and in a calmer space."

Doug Berry and Jenna Dias, neurofeedback practitioners at EQ-Advantage state that they see clients with different symptoms and all ages. It is encouraging how neurofeedback can help people to relieve symptoms without negative side effects. Often the positive changes are permanent and clients do not have to come back for further training any more as the brain learns to adapt and create new pathways.