Is Your Child Anxious or Depressed?

In today's American culture, almost every person experiences anxiety or depression on a regular basis and many of us are medicated in some way to help alleviate some of the pressure. As I sit here writing this article, I am reminded of my own history of childhood anxiety and panic attacks. At the time, anti-anxiety and antidepressant medications were uncommon. But today, they are widely used for adults as well as children. In fact, "Antidepressant use increased for all age groups between 1996 and 2005, including among children, despite a 2004 "black box" warning on antidepressant use in young patients." (Archives of General Psychiatry, August 2009).

It is amazing to think of our children suffering in this manner. I have a two year old son and he seems so carefree. How do I keep him from being affected by this legacy? How do we prevent all of our children from this type of hardship? In today's world, there are so many new challenges; a significant increase in behavioral and learning disorders such as attention deficit and autism, the proliferation of allergies and infectious disorders in our local, national, and global communities, the increased use of pesticides and synthetic fillers in our food, the potential negative effect of genetically modified foods (GMO) which are rampant in the standard American diet yet outlawed in European countries. There are many possible rationales for this increase in childhood anxiety and depression.

As a health practitioner, I see many more children today with anxiety and depression as compared to five years ago. "It is estimated that 3 percent of children and about 12 percent of teens suffer from depression. The increased awareness of childhood depression and its impact on a child has led to an increase in the use of antidepressants to treat these children." (Iannelli, V., 2009)

As many of us already know, prevention is the key to a healthy and balanced body and mind. Though prevention is an ideal path, many of our children are born with physiologic stressors already in place, a continuation of the legacy!

Solutions for Anxiety and Depression

Today, there are many tools to help decrease physiologic stress in the body, and thereby, decrease and eliminate anxiety disorders as well as depression in children and adults. A particular method that has been found to be very successful is a combined approach of Integrative Manual Therapy and nutritional wellness. Integrative Manual Therapy (IMT) is a hands-on approach to treatment of pain, disability, and disease. IMT was developed by Dr. Sharon (Weiselfish) Giammatteo over the past 30 years. IMT has been used by families for three decades to promote healthy living as well as decrease dysfunction in the body.

Integrative Manual Therapy for Childhood Anxiety and Depression

In the IMT model, there is an understanding that various organs, when they are in a state of inflammation, can produce certain negative emotions. Anxiety can be produced by the kidneys and adrenal glands as well as some other organs. Depression can be even more complex because there is endogenous depression (from within the body) and exogenous depression (from outside). Psychotherapy is such an important tool to help manage depression, but so often, it is not enough to make a sustainable change in the person. Depression may be secondary to emotional trauma and stress in our lives, but it may also be an effect of body dysfunction. For example, if a person has high levels of mercury in the body, which would be considered endogenous—this elevated level of toxicity may lead to depression as well as fatigue and headaches which are commonly linked with depression. On the other hand, the person may have experienced a physical trauma to their head, such as a car accident—this force can cause significant inflammation of the

central nervous system which can manifest as depression, in addition to other related symptoms such as chronic pain.

It is common knowledge in this country that infertility is on the rise today. When women are able to conceive, commonly, the pregnancy and delivery are problematic. Often, the baby is born with a 'failure to thrive' syndrome where they are underweight and possibly exhibiting respiratory distress. These are the children that are lacking resiliency in life. They may exhibit more allergies, skin issues such as eczema, learning deficits, and so on. Much of this is secondary to a weakened immune system from birth.

In all of these above scenarios, IMT can be used to decrease inflammation, promote circulation and immunity, and decrease overall tension in the affected organs and tissues. For example, if a child is experiencing regular anxiety in the classroom, it may be secondary to inflammation in the head which may have been brought on by an injury or even birth trauma from a long labor. The child may be having a hard time concentrating in the classroom because of tension and inflammation at the frontal lobe (located behind the forehead and involved in cognition and attention). Often, there is a gut association. Many of these children have a high toxic load in their liver and digestive tract. As a result, it may be challenging to sit still, but also this toxicity can produce anxiety or depression. In these children, IMT would be focused on decreasing inflammation and promoting normal circulation and drainage to and from the liver and the digestive organs. If the frontal lobe was involved, IMT would be focused on supporting optimal health of this part of the brain.

Let's use the head trauma as an example. Consider a child riding in a car and the car is front-ended. Even if the collision is minimal, there is a significant force that enters into the body through the head. This force travels down the spine to the sacrum (located above the buttocks at the bottom of the spine). The sacrum, in this scenario, is shoved downwards—this is referred to as a 'descended sacrum.' Though the displacement of the sacrum may only be 1mm, it is substantial because the spinal cord is attached to the sacrum as well as to the brainstem on the inside of the skull. When the sacrum is displaced, there is a 'tug-of-war' on the central nervous system. The central nervous system which houses our brain and spinal cord is involved in every aspect of the body. Often, when the central nervous system is 'on fire' in this way, the child may experience regular anxiety or depression. This displacement can also cause hyperactivity because of the compression at the base of the skull. The child may experience auditory or visual processing deficits as well as headaches because of this tension. Correcting this pattern of dysfunction is simple—mobilize the sacrum upwards. The challenge is when the problem is chronic. More often than not, this injury is not recent. For example, with a child, it may be from birth where the head of the baby is repeatedly pushed up against the mother's pelvic rim during a long delivery. In this situation, it is not enough to just mobilize the spine and sacrum. Preparatory treatment must be focused on decreasing muscle spasm and fascial tissue tension in the pelvis and at the base of the skull. Further treatment must also be focused on balancing the central nervous system following correction of a descended sacrum.

A typical IMT initial treatment session involves an assessment of all the major organs and tissues in the body, including the nervous system, circulatory system, and immune system. The IMT practitioner will also assess the child's posture and movement to determine if there are any significant stressors on the spine and head which may be contributing to the child's challenges. Once the assessment is completed, a comprehensive treatment plan is designed specifically focused on the sites of compromise discovered during the assessment. This treatment plan would be implemented over the course of multiple sessions.

Nutritional Wellness for Childhood Anxiety and Depression

In addition to Integrative Manual Therapy, nutritional wellness can be highly beneficial to support reduction of anxiety and depression in children. Nutritional wellness is most successful when it is a combined approach of dietary intervention and nutritional supplements. One important diet is a gluten elimination diet. Gluten is considered a 'pro-inflammatory' food. This means that when gluten is ingested, it induces further inflammation in the body, specifically in the areas of compromise. Considering the above example of a child with a descended sacrum, gluten may contribute to further inflammation of the central nervous system. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, barley, and oat. There are many substitutes today for gluten. Unfortunately, many of the lab tests for gluten sensitivity have been found to be inaccurate. The best way to discover whether you or your child has gluten sensitivity is to perform an elimination diet where you eliminate gluten 100% from the diet for 3-4 months and during that time, assess the changes. These changes are not just related to gut function. Remember the possible relationship to the brain—look for all kinds of changes in you and your child. The easiest way to implement this type of diet is to embrace it as a family.

There are many other forms of elimination diets specific to all types of allergens, such as soy, dairy, nut, and more. Elimination diets are a wonderful approach to discovering foods that we may be sensitive to. By eliminating these foods from our diet, we may experience many positive changes.

In addition to elimination diets, nutritional supplements may be beneficial. Many of us already use nutritional supplements. In today's era, it is challenging to attain everything we need for a healthy body just from our food. As an example, "official U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrient data shows that calcium content of broccoli averaged 12.9mg per gram of dry weight in 1950, but only 4.4 mg/g dry weight in 2003." (David, D, et al, 2003)

One important supplement is 'essential fatty acids.' Essential fatty acids are the basis of our cell walls of every cell in the body, including organs, vessels, nerves, bones, and muscles. Underlying any injury or infection, there is compromise to the wall of many cells. To correct the problem, our body needs to utilize essential fatty acids to repair the cells. These fatty acids are called "essential" because our body does not make them—they must be supplemented through our diet. Unfortunately, we would need to consume a large quantity of cold water fish to gain enough essential fatty acids for even just normal functioning of the body. With the recent rise in farm raised fishing, fish are being 'produced' with significantly lower lev-

els of essential fatty acids. Using salmon as an example, wild salmon eat plankton that is rich in essential fatty acids. In farm raised fishing, salmon are often fed grain, which not only is lacking in essential fatty acids, but also is often pro-inflammatory. Supplementing with cod liver oil is a great way of restoring our body's ability to repair itself on a cellular level. There are many other important examples of nutritional supplementation and elimination diets.

A Combined Approach of Integrative Manual Therapy and Nutritional Wellness

When considering a child with anxiety or depression, often the child is 'depleted.' In this common situation, the child's body needs support on multiple levels. Using Integrative Manual Therapy to restore integrity to the digestive system, the immune system, the central nervous system, and more along with nutritional wellness to replenish the body's nutrients is a beneficial approach to decreasing anxiety and depression in children. Using IMT and nutritional wellness as a combined approach is an essential component of maintaining optimal health in today's world. To learn more about this combined approach, please visit www.centerimt.com or email cimtbloomfield@centerimt.com.

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