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Pressure Points

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Amber King receives acupressure treatment to help her overcome learning disabilities in the Boulder office of Susan McCrossin. **King**, an 18-year-old student at Longmont High School, was first treated by McCrossin three years ago and returned recently for follow-up work. The treatment helps her to focus her eyes and be able to complete reading and writing assignments. Susan McCrossin, an applied physiologist, treats **Amber King**. McCrossin has developed a unique form of treatment for learning disabilities using pressure points to integrate the two sides of the brain. **Amber King** never crawled as a baby. In eighth grade, she read at a second-grade level; she couldn't march, tie her shoes or perform jumping jacks. But **King**, 18, says her life turned around at age 15, when she started treatment sessions with Boulder therapist Susan McCrossin.

McCrossin, who holds degrees in neuroscience and psychology, treats adults and children with behavioral disorders and learning disabilities without medication, using her own method that includes the Eastern healing art of acupressure. McCrossin has treated clients diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, dyslexia and other learning disabilities -- such as an inability to retain information, or difficulties in reading comprehension -- and her treatments have improved her clients' learning ability, creativity and physical coordination, she says.

"Before I was in a cloud, I was really lost," says **King**, who lives in Longmont and plans to graduate from Longmont High School in May. "I had to be told over and over again what to do, and I would forget. (Now) I'm able to do everything. I can drive. I can read better. I can do my math, go on errands and remember stuff."

King is one of many who suffer from lifelong learning disorders that include trouble processing information, which can manifest as problems in listening, speaking, reading, spelling, written expression and mathematics.

The National Institute of Health of the United States says that 15 percent of Americans have learning disabilities. Often learning disabilities co-exist with other conditions, including attention, behavioral and emotional disorders, sensory impairments or other medical conditions. The treatment of learning disabilities or behavior disorders that can be associated with them, such as ADHD, a condition that can make it hard for a person to sit still, control

behavior, and pay attention, remains controversial. Some psychiatrists and pediatricians recommend drug treatments, while other experts argue that drugs such as Ritalin for ADHD, are not the solution.

Some experts say they are happy to consider non-drug alternatives such as lifestyle changes, including more exercise, more omega-3 fatty acids, less television and video games and more sleep.

But not everyone is convinced that non-drug methods work.

John Cizman, who runs the Boulder Attention Deficit Disorder support group, says he reads all the

scientific literature pertaining to ADD and has not seen research suggesting acupressure is an effective treatment. Cizman also says he knows hundreds of parents through the group and none have talked about using acupressure as a means to treat their children. He also says some children with ADD have sensory issues and may be too sensitive to tolerate touching. "The fastest treatment is drugs," Cizman says. "I have found nothing as effective in the treatment as medication. I haven't heard any great successes with acupressure."

Unlocking the brain McCrossin says her non-medication solution works. The method, called the Brain Integration Technique, is based in part on acupressure -- a 5,000-year-old Japanese method similar to acupuncture, but without the needles, and designed to increase blood flow and restore body functions, including the brain. She developed it in 1989 with her ex-husband, Charles T. Krebs. Her method also incorporates applied physiology, a form of kinesiology that she says enables her to access and change specific body functions. According to McCrossin, learning disabilities are usually caused by "software glitches," meaning they are caused by biochemical problems that affect the flow of information in the brain, not brain damage.

Using her method, McCrossin performs "muscle testing" to determine which brain areas are malfunctioning. Her clients hold their arms straight out while she pushes on acupressure points and feels whether the muscle "locks," or has firm resistance to her pressure, or whether it "unlocks" and she can easily push the arm down. If the arm "unlocks," it signifies to her that there is a "stress" and that neurological information is not being routed to the correct location with the correct timing. McCrossin then treats the affected areas of the brain, through holding and releasing acupressure points. Those points correlate to a specific brain region, according to Eastern medicine. McCrossin says her technique enables information to come into the brain easily and be routed to the correct location with the correct timing. When this flow is restored, functions such as spelling and reading change, McCrossin says.

After about 10 one-hour sessions, **King** says she could tie her shoes, march and do jumping jacks. Her reading jumped from a second to a third-grade level without tutoring. Although she is entering 12th grade and only reads at a fifth-grade level, she says she's much happier now because she can participate in a regular classroom without special education. McCrossin charges \$120 per hour; most patients require about eight sessions, she says. Usually, her services are not covered by medical insurance, but sometimes, automobile insurance will cover an automobile-related injury.

Satisfied clients

McCrossin says she has treated around a thousand adults and children, some of whom travel from around the world for treatments, she says. Carol Mann, an anesthetist in San Diego says her son's life turned around two years ago when he received a weekend of intensive treatment at McCrossin's North Boulder home. Mann says her son, Alex Mann, now 12, had been diagnosed with ADHD at age 9. He did not pay attention in class, didn't do his homework and was day dreaming. Teachers at the school insisted he be put on Ritalin.

Mann says she didn't want her son to be taking Ritalin for the rest of his life. She says after McCrossin's treatment for eight hours one day and two hours the next, she took him off Ritalin "cold turkey."

Although she admits she hasn't noticed much change at home -- she says his behavior was always better at home than at school -- his teachers never noticed that he was no longer on Ritalin and stopped calling her, she says. Alex went from a C/D student to a B student, she says.

"Not one person has since says, 'Your child should be on Ritalin,'" Mann says. "The liberation from a lifelong label is a priceless gift. It allows the child to create life that is driven by their passion and not their arbitrary diagnosis."

Lyndee Paris, a psychiatrist practicing in Boulder, says she doesn't know much about McCrossin's technique, but she is interested in non-medicated cures for problems like ADD. A lot of these

problems stem from chronic stimulation, Paris says.

"Giving medication that is stimulating to someone who is already over-stimulated – even though clinically it is sometimes helpful -- doesn't address the underlying issues," Paris says. "I prefer to take a more holistic approach with lifestyle changes and perhaps either short term or low dose medication. Paris recommends that patients with ADD change their lifestyle -- spending less time in front of the television and computer and more time exercising and sleeping.

King discovered McCrossin's method after her mother, Maxine **King**-Bodine, was treated for memory loss after a car accident. Although she didn't go to the hospital, **King**-Bodine, 44, became disoriented and lost her photographic memory after the 1995 accident. The Longmont resident couldn't recall simple facts like the president's name or the days of the week. She lost the ability to write a shopping list or add simple numbers. Instead of automatically putting her foot on the brake while driving, she had to remember how to lift her foot, press on the pedal and lift it off. She tried occupational and physical therapies but nothing helped. **King**-Bodine met Susan McCrossin in 1997 and noticed a difference after one visit. She completed 10 sessions. Today, **King**-Bodine is studying for a degree in computer information systems. She can learn again, but she never regained her photographic memory. "My daughter **Amber** says, 'I don't mean this in a bad way, but I am so glad you had your car accident so you could understand what was going on with me and gotten this help for me," Bodine says. "That's life-changing."