Managing My AD/HD through Movement

by Robert M. Tudisco, Esq.

MY DIAGNOSIS AS AN ADULT WITH ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER was a major turning point in my life. The challenges and struggles I faced as a child made much more sense to me after I knew that there was a neurobiological reason for them. As a result I became much more introspective and tried to understand myself in the context of my AD/HD.

Devoted to real-life testimonies of coping with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, Attention*'s newest department made its debut in December 2007.*

I looked back on my life prior to my diagnosis and could see that many of the things I did were ways of coping with a disorder that I didn't know I had at the time. While I definitely struggled as a student, there were times that things seemed to come together and I excelled, even if they were few and far between. I took out my school records to see what methods I used to cope with my difficulty focusing attention and comprehending my classwork. I remembered that in college—especially during the semesters when my grades were the highest—exercise was a major part of my daily routine. Not only did I find that exercise helped me to focus, but the discipline of exercising religiously carried over into my schoolwork.

I also remembered when I was most stressed out during that time period, I would run. If something was on my mind, I would go out and run, regardless of the time of day or night. During these runs, I found solitude and I was able to think clearly. I was able to work through the stress and sort out my mind. Running was my time to organize and file the chaos which normally takes place behind my eyes. Physical fitness was merely a positive by-product.

Armed with this information and a new understanding of myself, I embraced running and made it a major part of my life. I wake up at 5AM three days a week and I run for about an hour, hopefully in the dark, and always alone. It accomplishes many things for me. It clears my head, organizes my thoughts, and maps out my day.

Running also gives me an overwhelming sense of control over my life. My AD/HD has always made me feel as if I had very little, and at times no, control over my life. Feelings of no control or a lack of self-esteem are common symptoms of AD/HD. My run is ***MY*** time, period. For that hour, three days a week, I am the master of my own universe. It may not be much, but it's mine and I look forward to it.

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When I am running, I think of myself as a thought factory that is powered by the movement of my body. There are times when there is so much going on in my head that I barely feel my feet hit the pavement when I set off. My mind just gets lost in motion.

One aspect of AD/HD that I always felt prior to my diagnosis was a significant disconnection between my whirlwind thought process and the physical reality of life. I remember, as a child in school, being given assignments, particularly those that were to be done over the long term. I would be excited at first, planning out how I was going to do the project. But the reality was always procrastination, stagnation, and paralysis. There was always a world of difference between what I wanted to do, how I envisioned doing it, and what actually got done. Running has bridged the gap for me between these different parts of my brain and makes me feel much more complete. For me, running represents the unity of

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Currently, I try to run a full marathon each fall as a means to set and reach goals for myself. The training represents a form of discipline that spills over into other aspects of my life. I have now completed five full marathons. In the fall of 2007, I ran the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, DC, and used it as a means to raise awareness about AD/HD and about CHADD. I also used the race as a means to raise money for CHADD's Matthew Cohen Membership Support fund. Out of all the marathons I have run, this was a unique opportunity to give special meaning to my training, given the fact that my running and my AD/HD are so closely related to me.

I have recently learned about much new research about the link between exercise and the brain. A regular program of exercise can improve concentration, attention, relieve stress, and more fully develop the brain. (See my review of *Spark*, by John Ratey MD, in this issue on page 48). For me, running accomplishes all of these things, but I encourage both children and adults to explore some form of regular exercise as a means to manage physical health and mental well being.

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