

Concentrating with ADHD

by Steffi Lau

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Senior Amir Rakib's notes are what one might call a disaster...but a particularly focused disaster. Punctured needle thin holes in geometric designs, shaded jagged patterns, and sketches of robots make his notes at once artistic and messy.

Rakib has Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. To him and others with ADHD, sitting in class is more than just a simple task. It's an internal struggle. Rakib sums up his disorder by saying, "It's like having 30,000

thoughts at once."

ADHD is a neurological genetic disorder, categorized by two subtypes, inattentive and hyperactive. Rakib is inattentive, meaning he finds it hard to focus. Those who are hyperactive feel a constant need for motion.

"Block days are torture," said junior Krislyn Cox, who is inattentive-hyperactive. "Sometimes I feel like I want to scream because we have to sit for so long."

However, Cox has come a long way since being diagnosed in second grade. Once a hyperactive girl who got in trouble at school for spinning in circles instead of sitting down, Cox can now sit through a class, only needing to reposition herself a few times when the agitation sets in.

As Cox learned to manage her hyperactivity, she has stopped relying on medication. Now she only takes medication when she has a big task such as studying for finals. The medication compensates for brain chemical deficiencies that cause ADHD. Rakib, who was diagnosed in third grade, did not start medication until he entered middle school.

"It was affecting me more emotionally,

academically, socially," Rakib said. "Kids would tease me and say, 'Amir, what's two times two?' And I would have to think about it for a while and end up saying 16. It wasn't that I was stupid, but if you know you're going to have trouble, it trips you up."

Although ADHD is a lifetime disorder, most people eventually find ways of dealing with its symptoms. Cox copes by playing card games by herself or finding things to organize such as jewelry boxes when she gets antsy. Rakib doodles. He also keeps a Rubik's Cube with him to play with when he finds it hard to focus. However, when asked if he's good at it, he laughs and extracts the usually multi-colored cube from his backpack. This one is completely white.

"It's called the Ego Cube," he said. "You can never lose. I peeled off the stickers so that it doesn't require thought. It's just something in your hands to fiddle with so you won't drive yourself crazy."

Rakib also carries around a palm-sized notebook that he uses to doodle, pencil in tasks, and store ideas. Rakib has gone through four.

Because of their conditions, Rakib and Cox qualify for extra time and less work when they have trouble with the material.

Rakib takes the course Learning Skills in Special Education. Last year, Cox took history online to focus more on math and English. However, Cox makes it clear that she doesn't use ADHD as an excuse to slack off.

"When I was little," Cox said. "I used to use my ADD to get out of assignments. But I was just cheating myself."

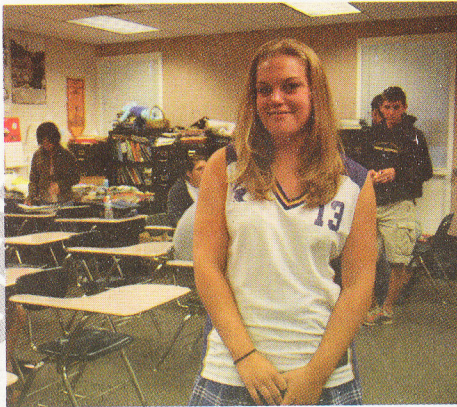
Contrary to what others might think, the disorder does not affect intelligence level.

"Think of the brain as a filing cabinet," Rakib said. "Everything you learn is stored there. It's not that I'm stupid. It just takes me longer to open that filing cabinet."

Although their disorders have shaped a large part of their lives, Cox and Rakib still maintain a positive mentality.

"The most common joke I've heard about ADD is when someone says, 'I don't have AD...' and then they walk off. But that's not really true. I won't walk off in mid-sentence unless it's something shiny," he wisecracked.

"A kid with ADD can use that [as an excuse], but the strongest kind of person will do what they need to do on their own," Cox said. "I can't depend on this disorder to get out of life. If I spend the effort, I can achieve more than I think."



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