

Identifying and Overcoming Learning Difficulties

“Maybe I’m just not concentrating enough. If I just study harder, I’ll be fine.” Those are thoughts that go through the minds of many graduate and professional students. So when does trouble focusing on coursework indicate there may be an undiagnosed learning disorder like attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder?

“One of the common misconceptions about the AD/HD is that if it hasn’t been diagnosed in childhood, you don’t have it,” says April Stein, Ph.D., Director of the Compas Program for Young Adults at The Menninger Clinic in Houston. “Many people are very good at compensating for AD/HD. They learned coping skills long ago and no one else ever caught on.”

Until recently, most people believed that children outgrew AD/

HD in adolescence, perhaps because hyperactivity often diminishes during this time. Research demonstrates that many symptoms continue into adulthood. Recent studies reflect rates of roughly 2-4 percent among adults, according to information from the national non-profit organization Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders (CHADD).

“There’s the notion that if you don’t have a problem with hyperactivity, you don’t have attention deficit,” Stein adds. “But adults who have no problem sitting still can have attention problems. They may make careless mistakes, or they can’t attend to tasks without getting distracted. They think maybe they just aren’t focusing enough, and they miss the signs that there may be an underlying physiological disorder that’s never been diagnosed,” says Stein.

More and more people are becoming aware of adult AD/HD and related problems, and Stein says at least half of the adults who enter the inpatient treatment program she

HELPS

Health Enhancement for Lifelong Professional Students

Could AD/HD be Limiting Your Success?

AD/HD in adults can show up in a number of ways, including these:

1. Problems with self-control and regulating behavior
2. Poor working memory
3. Poor persistence of efforts toward tasks
4. Difficulties with regulation of emotions, motivation and arousal
5. Greater than normal variability in task or work performance
6. Chronic lateness and poor time perception
7. Easily bored
8. Low self-esteem
9. Anxiety
10. Depression
11. Mood swings
12. Employment difficulties
13. Relationship problems
14. Substance abuse
15. Risk-taking behaviors
16. Poor time management



Since the symptoms of AD/HD are common to many other psychiatric and medical conditions and some situational/environmental stressors, adults should never self-diagnose and should seek a comprehensive evaluation from a qualified professional.

directs have attention deficit in some form.

AD/HD shows up in college students’ behavior and performance in a number of ways, says Stein. “In addition to

difficulty keeping up with school work, they may have trouble conversing and focusing in social situations, and others may think they’re rude. Another unusual aspect of the

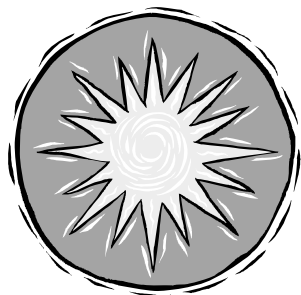
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Students & Learning Difficulties

Can a person be smart and still have AD/HD?

Yes, AD/HD has nothing to do with how smart a person is. Some individuals with AD/HD have very high IQ scores, others score in the average range, and others score much lower. Often individuals with AD/HD who are very bright are not recognized as being impaired with AD/HD symptoms.

Source: *Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)*



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disorder is that sometimes people who have it seem capable of doing four projects at once. In another of its forms, the disorder is associated with impulsivity. Some people have a hard time allowing themselves to think things through, and end up doing something dangerous. That's one of the signs we look for when diagnosing, especially if impulsiveness seems out of character."

The best treatment for AD/HD is still medication, says Stein. "Yet some of the drugs can be addictive, so for anyone who is at risk for misusing them, doctors will prescribe less addictive alternatives."

Other strategies for managing attention deficit disorders include clinics and special programs that teach coping strategies, studying and test-taking skills.

A professional coach can help the AD/HD adult learn how to organize his life, suggests National Institutes of Health literature. Tasks can be organized into sections, so that completion of each part can give a sense of accomplishment. Above all, AD/HD adults should learn as much as they can about their disorder. Small successes can help students begin to appreciate some of the positive characteristics of AD/HD — boundless

energy, warmth and enthusiasm.

Resources

Katz, L.J., Goldstein, G., & Beers, S.R. (2001). *Learning disabilities in older adolescents and adults*. New York: Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Press.

Nadeau, K. (1994). *College survival guide for students with ADD or LD*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

George Washington University, (1996). *ADD: The Race Inside My Head*. (video)

Quinn, P. (1993). *ADD and the College Student and Approaching College for Students with ADD*. Washington, DC: Pediatric Development Center. (video)

Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder www.chadd.org

International Dyslexia Association www.interdys.org

Learning Disabilities Association of America www.ldanatl.org ■

Money Matters: Useful Resources for Students

Managing your finances while you are in school can involve setting financial goals and objectives, determining how you will finance your education, budgeting, learning about public and private financing resources and how to survive cash flow crunches. The following publications and Web sources offer guidance and tips.

Dan Cassidy's Worldwide Graduate Scholarship Directory. Daniel J. Cassidy, Career Press, 1995.

Financing Graduate School. Patricia McWade, Peterson's, 1996.

Free Money for Graduate School. Laurie Blum, Henry Holt and Company, 1996.

How to Survive Without Your Parents' Money. Geoff Martz, Princeton Review, 1996.

The Official Guide to Financing Your MBA. Bart Astor, Nancy W. Ballard, editor. Graduate Management Admissions Council (GMAC). Warner Books, 1994.

www.nfcc.org – Consumer Credit Counseling Service

www.ftc.gov – Federal Trade Commission

www.accessgroup.org – Access Group, Inc. ■