

No Hits, No Runs, Many Errors...The ADHD Slump in Adulthood (Part I)

ADHD is often thought of as a childhood diagnosis that magically disappears in late adolescence. In fact, this disorder, which affects upwards of 10% of the population, often persists into adulthood and typically causes individuals to continue to struggle with core symptoms of impulsivity, inattention and hyperactivity. Despite this, until the last couple of decades the ADHD Adult diagnosis simply did not exist.

As adults, we often stumble upon our own or our partner's ADHD diagnosis after one or more of our children is diagnosed with the disorder. As diligent parents, we learn much about ADHD and how it affects our children, many of us finding our own "ah-ha" moment somewhere along this journey. This is hardly surprising given that ADHD is a highly inheritable disorder. It is also not surprising that many adults who were never diagnosed as children continue to remain undiagnosed or misdiagnosed as adults. One reason for this is that adults who have ADHD commonly also have co-existing symptoms of anxiety and depression, which compound the diagnostic difficulty. If after reviewing the common symptoms presented in this article you suspect that you or your partner has undiagnosed ADHD, it is essential to receive a comprehensive ADHD evaluation. The key to effective treatment with ADHD, as with any disorder, is an accurate diagnosis.

Knowledge is Power

Just what is Adult ADHD and how might it be impacting your daily life? First, it is important to know that ADHD, despite what some may believe, is real. ADHD is a neurological disorder. It is not the result of laziness, lack of willpower or a creation of the pharmaceutical industry. The information that follows is intended to present an overview of the common symptoms of Adult ADHD. Next month's newsletter article will explore strategies for managing them.

Difficulty Concentrating and Staying Focused

Adults with ADHD often have difficulty maintaining focus and are easily distracted. This is the "oooh, look at the shiny ball over there" symptom that derails concentration and causes you to bounce from one activity to another. You may find yourself having difficulty paying attention, zoning out without realizing it, having trouble staying focused while reading, struggling to complete even simple tasks,

overlooking details, listening poorly and having a hard time remembering conversations or directions.

Disorganization and Forgetfulness

With Adult ADHD, your life may seem out of control as you struggle to stay on top of daily responsibilities. Staying organized, setting priorities, keeping track of tasks and schedules, managing time effectively and remembering what needs to be accomplished are extremely challenging. You may have poor organizational skills at home or work which is often evidenced by extreme clutter in one's home, office or car. You may have a tendency to put things off and procrastinate due to difficulty with getting tasks started. You may forget appointments, commitments, or work deadlines. You may constantly misplace things, be chronically late or underestimate the time needed to complete tasks.

Impulsivity

This is the "ready, fire, aim" response commonly seen in individuals with ADHD, who may act first, and, think later. Adults with ADHD may interrupt others, act or speak before thinking, blurt out thoughts that are rude or inappropriate, talk excessively loud, have poor self-control, display addictive behaviors, and may behave or drive recklessly without regard for consequences.

Emotional Difficulties

Just as it is hard for individuals with ADHD to regulate impulses and attention, it is also often difficult to regulate emotions. Many adults with ADHD have difficulty managing their feelings, particularly when they are angry or frustrated. Often, adults with ADHD have poor self-esteem, deal with frustration poorly, tend to be insecure, have spotty relationships, are easily stressed-out, irritable, hypersensitive to criticism, have short fuses, frequent mood swings, and a pervasive sense of underachievement.

Restlessness

Hyperactivity in childhood often morphs into a sense of inner restlessness in adults. Some adults may still be "driven by a motor" but, for many, the symptoms become subtler. Adults with ADHD may feel agitated, become easily bored, have

racing thoughts, trouble sitting still, talk non-stop, crave excitement, and take excessive risks.

The Adult ADHD Impact

Maintaining one's balance in our complex world can be a challenging balancing act for any adult. As a child, you may have been able to compensate for the symptoms of ADHD, only to find that your symptoms increased as you faced the increasing responsibilities of adulthood. Managing careers, homes, children, spouses and other types of relationships places greater demands on your ability to focus, stay organized and remain calm. The more balls you have in the air, the harder they become to juggle.

The Good News

No matter how challenging the struggles in your life may seem, Adult ADHD can be managed through accurate diagnosis, education and effective treatment. With support, structure and knowledge, it is possible to turn ADHD weaknesses into strengths, longstanding limitations into achievements, and dreams into realities. One pathway to success lies in utilizing a coach to guide you through this process. Renowned author, Ned Hallowell, in his groundbreaking book *Driven to Distraction* "particularly likes the idea of an ADHD Coach...keeping the player focused on the task at hand and offering encouragement along the way.... the coach can stave off habits of procrastination, disorganization and negative thinking."

Next issue I will begin to explore some tips and strategies for Adults dealing with ADHD.

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