

UniversityHealthServices

We heal. We educate. We care.

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)

Imagine living in a fast-moving kaleidoscope, where sounds, images, and thoughts are constantly shifting. Feeling easily bored, yet helpless to keep your mind on tasks you need to complete. Distracted by unimportant sights and sounds, your mind drives you from one thought or activity to the next. Perhaps you are so wrapped up in a collage of thoughts and images that you don't notice when someone speaks to you.

For many people, this is what it's like to have **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**, or **ADHD**. They may be unable to sit still, plan ahead, finish tasks, or be fully aware of what's going on around them. To their family, classmates or coworkers, they seem to exist in a whirlwind of disorganized or frenzied activity.

But there is help... and hope. In the last decade, scientists have learned much about the course of the disorder and are now able to identify and treat children, adolescents, and adults who have it. A variety of medications, behavior-changing therapies, and educational options are already available to help people with ADHD focus their attention, build self-esteem, and function in new ways.

What are the symptoms of ADHD?

We now know that children with ADHD do not necessarily outgrow the condition when they become adults. The symptoms frequently lead to difficulties in college, on the job, in relationships, and in daily living.

ADHD looks different in adults than it does in children. Most noteworthy is the lack of obvious hyperactivity in adults. Generally, by the time a person with ADHD reaches late adolescence, he or she has learned to inhibit obvious signs of hyperactivity, such as not staying seated. Adolescents and later adults experience a form of hyperactivity, which appears as mental restlessness and constant fidgeting. Adults with hyperactivity are often pencil twirlers, foot tappers, and often jaw clinchers.

Adults with ADHD: Typical Presenting Complaints

- Poor school/work performance
- Poor sustained attention to reading, paperwork, or lectures
- Easily bored by tedious materials
- Poor organization and planning
- Procrastinating until deadlines are imminent
- Restlessness, trouble staying in confined spaces
- Impulsive decision-making
- Cannot work well independently
- Doesn't listen carefully to directions
- Frequent impulsive job changes
- Poor academic grades despite solid intellectual ability
- Often late for work/appointments
- Frequently misplaces things
- Trouble thinking clearly, using sound judgment, especially under stress
- Generally poor self-discipline
- Poor interpersonal skills
- Impulsive comments to others
- Quick to anger and frustrate
- Verbally abusive to others
- Poor follow-through on commitment
- Poor listening skills

What causes ADHD?

Health professionals do not know what causes ADHD. Over the last decades, scientists have come up with possible theories about what causes ADHD. Some of these theories have led to dead ends, some to exciting new avenues of investigation.

What should I do if I think I have ADHD?

The **Learning Disability Office (865-1436)** located at 105 Boucke Building assists students who have been diagnosed with a Learning Disability or ADHD. That office is located on the Web at www.lions.psu.edu/ods/. The Learning Disability Office will also talk to students who feel they may have ADHD or LD and evaluate their academic problems. If the Learning Disability office recommends complete testing, you will be referred to a private psychologist or the Psychology Clinic in the Moore Building. Students already on medication for ADHD and want to have the medication prescribed while at school may call **Counseling and Psychological Services (863-0395)** located at 221 Ritenour Building, where they will have an initial evaluation and be scheduled for a clinician.

Some Coping Strategies for College Students with ADHD

- When necessary, ask the instructor to repeat instructions, rather than guess.
- Break large assignments into small, simple tasks. Set a deadline for each task and reward yourself as you complete each one.
- Each day, make a list of what you need to do. Plan the best order for doing each task. Then make a schedule for doing them. Use a daily planner to keep yourself on track.
- Work in a quiet area.
- Do one thing at a time.
- Give yourself short breaks.
- Write things you need to remember in a notebook with dividers. Write different kinds of information – like assignments, appointments, and phone numbers – in different sections. Keep the book with you at all times.
- Post notes to yourself to remind yourself of things you need to do. Tape notes to the bathroom mirror, on the refrigerator, or on the dashboard of your car – wherever you're likely to need the reminder.
- Store similar things together. For example, CDs in one place and tape cassettes in another. Keep canceled checks in one place and bills in another.
- Create a routine. Get yourself ready for school or work at the same time, in the same way, every day.
- Exercise, eat a balanced diet, and get enough sleep.

Test Results and Advice Nurse

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

Appointments

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774

For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at www.sa.psu.edu/uhs
This publication is available in alternative media on request.

Neuro-Psych_ADHD_080199

Approved by Patient Education Committee: 08/01/1999

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. This information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.