

ADHD: Always on the Go

Warning signs for attention deficit disorder.*

By PsychologyToday.com

We all have garden-variety memory lapses. Where are my eyeglasses? Did I turn off the stove? But the adult with ADHD is a special case. Over and over, he leaves his wallet at the store, she forgets her son's basketball game, he can't finish projects at work, her finances are in the red, or he forgets to unhook the gas pump from the car only to drive off (the last example has to be the most original).

Some 4 to 5 percent of children have ADHD, and 60 percent of these children carry symptoms well into adulthood. For the adult with ADHD, the disorder can interfere with relationships at home and at work. And to make matters worse, other problems and conditions—such as alcoholism or social anxiety—can hide symptoms, making treatment difficult.

Untreated symptoms can often bring on feelings of low self-esteem or low mood. The ADHD adult can be a high achiever, for example, but her disorganization holds her back from unmet goals that then lead to poor self-image. Of course, symptoms may lead her straight to a bout with depression or even chronic anxiety.

What's more, these individuals are also more likely to smoke; smoking is twice as common among people in this population. Researchers at Columbia University are studying smokers who have ADHD symptoms; they are interested in the effects of the drug methylphenidate and whether it might reduce symptoms of ADHD as well as tobacco withdrawal. Research like this may help us better understand the disorder.

Yet the tendencies of the ADHD adult can also be directed to one's advantage. Some, for instance, are hyper-focused on tasks that interest them. That's why professions such as medicine, science, or art may be better suited for these individuals. It's no surprise, then, that people like Albert Einstein, John Lennon, and Beethoven are said to have had symptoms of ADHD.

Sometimes, just being aware of the symptoms can be a big help. What you may not know is that there are three types of ADHD: inattentive, hyperactive, or impulsive. While all types affect executive function, each one has its own quirks. Here are some signs to look for:

Listen Up

The inattentive ADHD adult is pretty much a disorganized person. She often gets bored and easily distracted, losing herself in daydreams. With little attention to detail, she can make careless mistakes. All of which leads to an inability to focus and follow instructions. Conversely, this person can focus too much on tasks of interest and can even underestimate the time needed to complete these tasks. This can fuel procrastination and lateness. Don't be too put off as the inattentive ADHD adult can appear aloof or even arrogant.

On the Go

The hyperactive suffers restlessness, even fidgety hands and feet. It's not surprising to find this person squirming in general. He also is known to talk excessively, hopping from one topic to another. She may be dogged by feelings of being overwhelmed.

Thinking Before Acting

The impulsive type may suffer irritability, anger, and impatience. She, in fact, cannot curb her reactions. In interactions with others, he may speak without thinking, interrupt others, and suffer poor timing. These people sometimes suffer addictions like impulsive shopping or even eating disorders.

What You Can Do

Many people who have ADHD see marked improvement through a combination of talk therapy and medication. But each person is different, so treatment plans must be tailored to the individual. Here are some steps you can take to combat ADHD. First, consult a mental health professional and ask for a thorough assessment covering everything from attention span to medical exam. Also ask about medications such as Ritalin and Adderall. Different drugs, however, work for different individuals; you may have to try one and then another. Plus, studying up on ADHD will help as well as building skills like using to-do lists, day planners, and filing systems. You can also divide large tasks into smaller more manageable ones, that way you will not feel so overwhelmed. If you need further tools to manage your behavior, try meditation or relaxation techniques. And lastly, turning to others by joining an ADHD support group will let you know you are not alone.

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