

Adult Attention Deficit Disorder

Understanding, Diagnosis & Treatment

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Introduction

Quite likely, George is someone you know. In fact, George may be someone you love very much. But don't worry--we will not violate George's privacy. George is often disorganized. He loses things, has trouble listening to detailed directions, and he has a tendency to become bored easily. He has a short attention span, unless he is very interested in something. There are times at work where the harder he tries to do something the worse it gets. In addition, he does not seem to work well by himself and he frequently waits till the last minute to begin a task or assignment.

It could take him several hours to complete one small project and he often does not finish it. He has jumped from job to job in the last five years.

His family complains that he is unreliable, moody, and easy to become angry. Lately, his wife has become so frustrated that she is now contemplating an action that had previously been unthinkable- getting a

divorce. People who have problems similar to those George has experienced are diagnosed with Adult Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

ADD is a disorder that may affect many areas of a person's life. Problems with attention, acting on impulse, restlessness, and being easily distracted constitute the core symptoms of the disorder. It is estimated that about 17 million people in the United States struggle with ADD.

Those with ADD are often distracted, disorganized and Impulsive.

People such as George commonly report that they feel differently than others. Because of the problems that come with ADD, they may experience low self-esteem without knowing why. There are many people similar to George who are confused and misunderstood and the people around them, such as their coworkers, friends and family, do not understand them either.

Unfortunately, a myth exists that indicates ADD is not a real problem. This myth may occur because ADD symptoms are not always obvious and they are not consistent over time. It is not uncommon for a person to do quite well the first few weeks of a new school year or on a new job and then begin to struggle as his or her surroundings become familiar and boring. At this

point problems often begin because the victims are unable to keep their attention and stay on task over time.

People often feel relieved once a diagnosis has been made.

In the case of George, he lost his job after being employed for six weeks. George enjoyed his job at first because it was new and the newness kept his attention. As time went on, however, George was unable to stay focused and on task, which meant his performance suffered and his boss became angry with him. George received several warnings and he was finally terminated. George may experience feelings of helplessness. To make matters worse, people such as George's wife and his boss often feel frustrated and angry with those who have ADD.

On the other hand, those who have been diagnosed with ADD often feel a sense of relief after it has been identified. ADD once diagnosed can be understood and treated. A cluster or group of symptoms must be identified before a diagnosis can be made. The ADD diagnosis is determined using the symptoms listed in the next section.

Attention Deficit Symptoms

How to recognize some ADD symptoms, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual and other credible sources:

- A history of ADD symptoms recognized in childhood
- Difficulty with distractibility and a short attention span
- Symptoms are seen in work, school and leisure time
- Putting things off to the last minute
- Difficulty with organization
- Trouble staying focused and paying attention to details
- Careless mistakes
- Trouble being on time
- Easily bored
- Trouble staying on one task
- Trouble losing things
- Difficulty following directions
- Difficulty with control of emotions
- Communication problems in relationships
- Difficulty in areas that call for reading, writing and arithmetic
- Trouble sitting still or restless energy
- Talks excessively or blurts out answers

- ADD symptoms must impair at least two environments of a person's life (For example, work and home).

If You Suspect ADD

The first priority is to seek the advice of a physician to determine whether or not a physical condition is causing ADD-like symptoms. Some medical conditions that look like ADD are seizures, learning problems, lead poisoning and people who have experienced a head injury.

It is very important to distinguish between ADD and other disorders.

If a medical condition is not found to be responsible for the symptoms, consult a psychologist, psychiatrist or physician who can diagnose and treat ADD appropriately because determining a true diagnosis can be very complicated. The best way to determine whether or not a person has ADD is to investigate his or her behavior in different settings. In other words, do these symptoms occur at home, at work, and at play? It is vitally important to look at the person's ability to manage his or her life over time.

Most research indicates that ADD is inherited genetically. A person would not suddenly begin having symptoms of ADD as an adult; he or she must

have symptoms from early childhood. There must be trouble with a short attention span and a strong tendency toward distraction.

The Evaluation Process

The objective of the evaluation process is to distinguish between ADD and other reasons for symptoms in problems similar to ADD. A clinical interview and testing with a trained professional is necessary in order to obtain this objective.

Remember only a trained professional can make an accurate diagnosis.

In the clinical interview, the patient and his or her family bring in information about their concerns and they describe how the patient functions in his or her world. The professional begins to formulate a diagnosis in exploring how the activities of daily living affect the patient.

Most ADD testing is composed of a set of formalized questions addressing ADD symptoms. For best results, the testing should be given to the patient and to those who know the patient well. Testing is a necessary tool for the professional to confirm whether or not ADD is the proper diagnosis.

In summary, a lot of information is presented: information from the patient, the family and test results. Results of this information combined with the knowledge, insight and experience of the professional determine a diagnosis of ADD.

Keep a good record of symptoms to report to the professional.

George remembers having trouble staying focused in the third grade. His parents' remember his grades failing. He remembers teachers commenting on his not staying on task and day dreaming. Currently, his wife complains about his not following through with his promises. Because of his wife's complaints, employment troubles, and George's communication problems, their relationship has experienced much stress. These issues combined led to George seeking professional help.

Types of ADD

Most qualified professionals believe there are three different types of ADD. However, many professionals often feel confused about the different types. An attempt will be made to clear up this misunderstanding.

Not all ADD looks the same.

1) ADD hyperactivity type. A person with this type of ADD will likely experience symptoms such as a having trouble keeping still, having trouble functioning quietly and failing to have a focused, sustained attention. The ADD hyperactive person appears to have too much energy and have difficulty focusing. This is the classic type people hear about most. Because it is the most familiar type it is often detected and treated early.

2) ADD without hyperactivity type or the inattentive type. A person with this type may sit and day dream his or her time away. The result is a failure to have focused attention without the high energy that comes with hyperactivity. In fact, people who struggle with this type have problems that emerge with lack of energy and effort. Some researchers believe the inattentive type of ADD is a distinct disorder from the hyperactivity type.

Many professionals miss this type of ADD because they believe attention deficit disorder must have hyperactivity to be a true diagnosis. Because George never experienced hyperactivity, an ADD diagnosis had been missed many times previously.

Different types of ADD can easily be misunderstood.

3) ADD over focused type. The person appears stuck intensely in one activity or thought. A person may stay on one task for a long time and not realize how much time has passed. This type is most misunderstood because it appears contradictory to what many understand about ADD.

Brain Functioning and the Consequences of ADD

Imagine an engine with the spark plug wires not attached securely to the spark plugs causing misfiring, or a dance team not in synch causing much disorganization. Imagine a football team with each individual player running his or her own play instead of working together. The play on the field would be utter chaos. Researchers talk about parts of the brain that include the frontal lobes, the cortex, and the reticular activating system.

These areas of the brain, like the parts of your car, must work together in an organized manner to accomplish many complicated tasks. ADD individuals experience similar difficulties and frustrations in managing their lives because their brains do not seem to work in synch. In other words, a struggle exists to function efficiently.

The brain is responsible for thoughts, feelings and behavior.

The brain is responsible for a person's ability to think, learn, and act. It helps control emotions, frustration tolerance, and the ability to think before reacting. The brain controls the ability to get started, pay attention, and complete work. It is responsible for how effectively a person learns new information. It helps people socially in recognizing when they have hurt or annoyed someone.

A person with ADD who struggles with impaired functioning for years is likely to experience a number of problems with a great deal of frustration. Because of attention problems he or she is more likely to be involved in risky behavior and experience bone fractures, car accidents, and chronic medical problems than people without ADD. The consequences of ADD left untreated may be severe.

It is not uncommon for ADD to pass from one generation to the next.

Problems with thinking and behaving are not a simple problem of will power and paying attention. It is not uncommon for those with ADD to have low

self-esteem to the point where they stop trying and give up. Giving up often leads to self-destructive behaviors such as destroying relationships, food addiction, and drug abuse.

Research shows that ADD adults tend to abuse drugs sooner, abuse drugs longer, and have more trouble in recovery than those without ADD. They are more likely to struggle with anxiety and depression and to endure a lifetime of more difficult problems than those without ADD.

Untreated ADD can make what could have been a full life a life of frustration and helplessness instead. George experienced many relapses in drug treatment for several years before being diagnosed and treated for ADD.

Treatment

For best results, the person diagnosed and his or her family must take an active role in the treatment once a diagnosis is accepted. Many tools exist today that can help the person and his or her family function more effectively with ADD.

Remember nobody can take care of you as well as you can.

The person seeking treatment and his or her family must be educated about problems that come with ADD. The person interested in learning more about ADD can read books, surf the internet (at reliable sources like CHADD.Org), talk to professionals and go to support groups. In your education process, two critical treatment domains must be considered-- therapy with a qualified counselor and medication.

In addition, success depends on healthy lifestyle changes. Nobody can take care of you as well as you can take care of yourself. Making good decisions is necessary for positive results. Positive results include finding the right therapist, finding the right medication, and developing a productive way to think and believe.

Hope and Positive Change

Hope is the belief in the positive--hope that things can change and that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. In other words, we may be in difficult circumstances, but we believe that positive change will take place.

When faced with any challenge, such as ADD, hope is essential to success.

If you believe there will be no light at the end of the tunnel, then you won't

discover it when it comes. In other words, if you believe there is no opportunity for improvement, then because of your disbelief, improvement will not come.

Hope is often equated with optimism and pessimism is often equated with realism. However, let's balance the way we look at life. Therefore, combine realism which is the fact of the situation, and optimism which is our hope and positive attitude.

Hope is essential to success.

George often saw his hope turn to despair when results were not positive. However, he began to see hope when his wife encouraged him and reminded him of his steady improvement. Success is not always the destination but the accomplishments along the journey.

The Importance of a Positive Focus

People with ADD tend to focus excessively on their weaknesses. However, people with ADD who learn to focus on their strengths in the present and in the future will likely build confidence, and confidence is essential to continued improvement.

People with ADD should get involved with-hands on-performance related activities. Tasks where they use their hands and where they can keep active seem to fit best. For example, sales, construction, floral design, sculpting and certain types of assembly work that offer movement and change can prove to be successful for the ADD person.

George's last job required too much attention to detail and too much concentration. After being diagnosed and treated he was able to find a job with more physical activity and diversity thus increasing his confidence. This produced positive results for George.

Recognize and build on your strengths

These types of job experience offer more rewards than if a person were stationed at a desk job that may not provide enough activity. For the ADD individual such as George, quiet inactively can be emotionally painful, unrewarding, and ineffective. Therefore, the ADD person should search for high stimulus activities to do and to find his or her strengths.

Organizing the Unorganized

Everyone needs to be organized on some level, but the ADD person usually struggles significantly more than the average person. Organization skills with treatment give structure and order to the life of those who deal with ADD.

A person needs to decide what is most important and what is least important in one's life as he or she begins to organize. This process sometimes feels overwhelming. Starting small will allow you to manage your stuff and your world around you much more easily. Start organizing your things using small piles.

Organization is a skill that can be learned

It is a good idea to start with three piles as you begin to make order in your world. In the first pile, put items you find yourself using most often or most every day. In the second pile, place the items you plan to use occasionally and in the third pile put the items that you use least often. After some time, you may want to look at the third pile.

You may discover that you have not used some items in this pile for quite some time. It might be a good idea to throw some items away at this point.

A good rule of the thumb: If you do not use something for more than a year then throw it away.

Additionally, set aside time every week to review what might need to be organized. Organization skills start when a written plan is used. Make priority lists and use a palm pilot to help manage and organize issues you deal with daily. Ask a friend to be an accountability partner with you to help you remember to do things and to be accountable to yourself. Place your keys, wallet and purse at the same place at the end of the day. This way, you can find them easily the next morning instead of searching around frantically looking for things you need that you cannot find.

Order reduces chaos

Decide what is most important in your life. For example, you might look at relationships, work, and finances. Take a close look at your health which includes your physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Above all, focus on your strengths.

Relationships at Work and at Play

In dealing with a spouse and family, certain skills can be used to keep problems from becoming worse. Staying positive with each other is an essential key to good relations. Also, because ADD is likely hereditary it would be helpful to see if others in your family have ADD. The more everyone in your family can focus and stay calm the more likely everyone will relate more effectively. Misunderstandings are common in families with ADD. Therefore, good communication skills can be extremely helpful. Skills such as speaking clearly, asking about misunderstandings, and staying calm improve communication greatly in any family, but they are especially helpful in families who have members with ADD.

Stay calm and positive with each other while discussing problems.

In dealing with the work environment, find employment that best fits your interests and your skills. Be alert to problems associated with ADD in the work place. Common problems that can interfere with effectiveness at work include being chronically late, procrastination, and becoming distracted. George began to wear a timer that went off every hour. This gave him the opportunity to refocus and not to be distracted continually. As a result, he was able to be efficient and finish work in a timely manner. He marked due

dates on his calendar which helped him meet deadlines and keep his work place organized.

Medication: An Essential Part of Treatment

Our body is an amazing organism and it is designed to last for several years if it is taken care of. However, when our body experiences problems, assistance from medication can be helpful and at times even save lives. For example, high cholesterol and high blood pressure are treated with necessary medication to help prevent heart attacks and to provide the patient with a more healthy life. Like the body, the brain can experience significant problems.

Medication reduces unwanted symptoms

Fortunately, modern science has provided exceptional medications that can reduce symptoms to include less hyperactivity and improved ability to focus. According to research, symptoms can best be reduced with medication. Therefore, medication is an important ingredient in the appropriate treatment for ADD. The brain responds more effectively and allows a person to focus better than without medication. Without appropriate medication, other options for treating ADD are less effective. It is not uncommon to try more

than one medication to find one that will work as needed. However, some ADD symptoms do not subside with only one medication, but a combination of medications may prove to be more effective. Track symptom changes with your doctor.

Remember to consult with your medical doctor about all changes, concerns or questions regarding your medications.

Stimulants are some of the most commonly used and researched medications and they have been around since 1937. Many people believe that stimulant medications are not safe. However, research suggests that these medications are very safe when taken appropriately.

Nevertheless, stimulants can cause mild side effects. Possible side effects that may occur are sleep problems and lack of appetite that could lead to weight loss. Caution should be used when considering stimulant medications for people who have heart problems because these medications generally increase heart rate and blood pressure.

Fortunately, Other medications are available that do not have such side affects.

If you have ADD, medication and counseling are your friends.

Other medications that may help relieve ADD symptoms are certain non-stimulants like antidepressants and atomoxetine (such as Strattera). Some side effects that occur with these medications include dry mouth, increased sweating, dizziness, nausea, tiredness and vomiting. The medications and side effects listed above are not intended to be a complete list but to give a basic understanding of medications prescribed and some of the side effects that come with them. **All medications and their effects should be monitored closely by your physician especially when medications are used in combination.**

Scans of the ADD brain indicate its functioning is significantly improved with medication. Studies of ADD patients suggest that medication reduced their symptoms by 60 to 75%. Everyone has a choice concerning whether or not they will take medication. Some people decide not to take medication. However, many people diagnosed with ADD report that the benefits of medication outweigh possible side effects.

Medication and counseling offer the opportunity for a considerably improved life that most likely would not have been possible otherwise.

Remember, a high quality of life is most important.

Successful People Who Have ADD

Everyone must deal with life's issues and challenges that come his or her way. Each challenge often brings with it frustration to overcome.

ADD does not mean you can't be successful.

However, the person struggling with ADD has an extra burden to bear because of the problems that come with the disorder. Still, many people with ADD lead very successful lives.

Terry Bradshaw reports that his biggest challenge has been ADD. Yet, he is a former professional NFL quarterback and Hall of Fame inductee. Chris Kaman, a professional basketball player, struggles with ADD. Two psychiatrists, Drs. Edward Hallowell and Dr. John Ratey, struggle with ADD. They wrote the book *Driven to Distraction* which is a "must read" for those who want to know more about ADD. Many others who function well with ADD can be productive in an endless number of professions.

Untreated vs. Treated ADD

Consequences and treatment may vary based upon the type and severity of ADD and the patient's compliance with treatment. The table below on page 25 represents two possible life-styles. One life-style is a life without treatment and the possible consequences that accompany it. The other life-style is a life with treatment and the possible rewards that come with it.

Consequences of Untreated
ADD

Consequences of Treated
ADD

- 1) Poor performance in school and unrealized potential
- 2) Unaware of social cues because of inattention
- 3) Difficulty with hyperactive behavior increases problems in class and isolation from others
- 4) Frustrated wanting to belong socially
- 5) Teachers and Parents frustrated by apparent lack of interest in school
- 6) Teachers and Parents become critical of behavior
- 7) Self esteem, confidence and competence become undermined
- 8) Struggle to meet life's challenges equals stress
- 10) Poor coping skills, inattention and problems with peers leads to job losses
- 11) More difficulty with the ability to keep attention leads to a life time of problems

- 1) Improved attention better grade
- 2) Gaining friends- involved socially
- 3) Fewer problems with hyperactive behavior decreases problems in class and prevents isolation from others
- 4) Becoming more involved well liked by others
- 5) Teachers and Parents proud by apparent interest in school
- 6) Teachers and Parents become encouraging of behavior
- 7) Self esteem, confidence and competence continues to develop
- 8) Continued success with new challenges equals new skills and abilities
- 10) Good coping skills, success with peers and work on attention problems leads to increased improvement
- 11) Continued work with attention issues, coping skills and relationships leads to a full life

Final Comments

This book would not be complete without sharing our experience working with people who deal with ADD. We believe ADD is a spectrum disorder or a cluster of symptoms on a continuum. In other words, there are people who have only a few ADD symptoms to those with many symptoms.

We are aware that change can be very difficult for most people. Some might think that ADD is not a real disorder. Others may deny or do not want to believe it as a real disorder. Sometimes people do not want to believe they or someone close to them has a problem. Others may know they have ADD but they do not know how to proceed about getting treatment. Seeking treatment can empower your life.

Reaching a dream starts with seeking an opportunity.

In decades of working with people diagnosed with ADD, we have known many who lead successful lives to include airline pilots, attorneys, psychologists, physicians, professional athletes, and many other important professions. We know people with ADD who report that they have to work much harder and longer than the average person. However, their hard work is worth the investment because of the satisfaction of success. Therefore,

success builds self-esteem. The person's motivation to change along with appropriate treatment can offer a person a higher quality of life.

We have enjoyed writing this book and hope you find it informative as well as enjoyable. We seek integrity in our work to be honest, to understanding and to be forthright. This book is not intended to be the last word about ADD, but it is intended to be an encouragement to those who want to know more about ADD. Finally, we want to emphasize once again how important it is to consult with a qualified professional if you suspect some one you know has ADD.

All e-books are based on our years of professional experience and mainstream scientific research. We enjoy hearing from our customers and friends, so feel free to e-mail us your thoughts and feelings about what we do and what we can do to serve you better.

Thank you for sharing your time with us

Bibliography Paragraph

Although much of the information compiled in this book is based on years of clinical experience, a number of experts deserve much credit for their studies which provide sound research on the subject of Adult Attention Deficit Disorder. Stephen L. Able, Joseph A. Johnson, Lenard A. Adler and Ralph W. Swindle contribute much with their study, published in January 2007, about adults with ADD who are

undiagnosed. Their results indicate significant impairment for those with ADD in emotional, social, and relational situations in comparison with those without ADD. Thomas E. Brown is recognized for his work on brain functioning and the consequences of ADD. Daniel G. Amen and Russell Barkley contribute greatly to the understanding of adult ADD, its diagnosis, and treatment. In addition, they provide information necessary to understand some of the different types of medications used for the treatment of ADD. Kate Kelly and Peggy Ramundo bring a positive approach to understanding ADD. They provide practical suggestions on how to develop skills to help the patient and his or her family manage ADD effectively. Finally, Perry Cotham deserves great appreciation for his willingness to edit this project.

About the Author

Dr. Stan Clark began working in Nashville, TN in 1998 after leaving private practice in the Knoxville area. Dr. Clark is a Licensed Psychologist with a doctorate from Pepperdine University and master's degree from Abilene Christian University. He performed his predoctoral internship at the Counseling Center at the University of Memphis. His treatment interests are broad but he specializes in working with marital and family issues and families who deal with chronic illnesses. Dr. Clark has been counseling individuals, couples and families for more than twenty four years. He is the owner of Doctor Integrity. Doctor Integrity is a business dedicated to providing personal educational resources for individuals, couples, and

families as they seek to educate themselves about possible solutions to life's problems.

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