



## The Many Faces of ADHD: Adults<sup>i</sup>

***“What do you mean I have ADHD? That’s just a kids’ thing!”***

Everyone used to think that only kids had ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder). We now know that adults have it too and that, for millions of people, it's a lifelong disorder. Many adults only find out they have ADHD years after they have left school. If you only recently learned you have the disorder, you are not alone!

ADHD makes it very difficult to pay attention and stay focused. Many adults with ADHD have a hard time controlling their impulses or "holding their horses." Other signs –or symptoms— include forgetting things easily, having a hard time staying motivated to do chores, and difficulty knowing how to organize daily life. ADHD can cause problems at work, at home, and with everyday living. ADHD tends to run in families. ***It is not your fault, but it IS your responsibility to get the help you need*** so that ADHD’s impact on your life is minimized.

Some people have symptoms that are mild and easily managed. Others have more pronounced ones. No two people with the disorder are the same.

### **How is ADHD diagnosed?**

There is no single test for ADHD. To see if you have the disorder, a clinical professional uses several different sources of information. They include:

- The problems that you report.
- Questionnaires you fill out about how you act and how you feel today and in the past.
- Information from a spouse/partner, or someone else close to you.
- A physical exam to make sure the problems you are reporting aren't caused by something else.

### **How do I know if I need help?**

There is no "magic formula" for knowing when to see a professional, but most adults who end up with an ADHD diagnosis report the following:

- They have trouble keeping jobs either because they keep quitting or they get fired often.
- They have trouble being on time for appointments, or finishing what they start.

- Household chores often don't get done; bills go unpaid because they get forgotten.
- They have problems with relationships because it's hard to remember important dates, they forget to make good on promises or because they get annoyed easily.
- They feel worried and stressed a lot because of the difficulty in meeting goals and responsibilities.
- They have strong feelings of frustration, guilt or low self-esteem.

As with every other diagnosis in medicine, there are some guidelines for determining whether you have ADHD or not. It's not enough to just have all of the symptoms. They have to be ***strong enough*** to cause you problems such as those listed in the bullet points, above; if they don't get in your way, then you are not impaired, and you won't be diagnosed. Finally, you must have problems due to the symptoms in ***at least two areas of your life*** – such as at work and at home.

### **How do I find a professional qualified to diagnose ADHD?**

One good place to start with is your primary care doctor. Let him or her know about your concerns and ask for a referral to a professional with expertise in evaluating an adult for ADHD. Another great starting place is a support group for people with ADHD and related disorders. The people who attend those groups often have years of experience finding professionals in their community. They could give you word-of-mouth referrals.

### **Who is qualified to diagnose ADHD?**

There are several types of professionals who are qualified to diagnose ADHD. They include psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and other types of mental health practitioners. It's a good idea to make sure the person you are seeing isn't just qualified, but also has a lot of experience treating ADHD. Don't be afraid to ask the person about his or her experience.

### **How should I prepare for the evaluation?**

There's no preparation needed. Many adults are nervous or anxious at the thought of seeking an evaluation. That's understandable. However, keep in mind that the professional you see has probably heard about many situations like yours. He or she won't judge or criticize you. The more open you are about the problems you are having, the better you can be helped. Remember: you didn't cause your ADHD, so ***there's nothing to be ashamed of.***

### **What happens during the evaluation?**

During an evaluation, the clinical professional will ask you questions about your life and health. He or she will want to know how you are doing in your job and with friends. A clinician will also ask whether you had problems at school as a kid. Did you get into trouble often, or find the classwork hard? He or she will ask you to fill out some brief questionnaires which have multiple-choice answers. It can be helpful to bring along someone close to you who can share his or her perspective. The two of you might not agree on some things. That's ok. The professional just wants to spot basic

patterns and trends. Be as honest as you can during your evaluation and treatment. Remember that the clinician can't give an accurate diagnosis or treatment plan without your help.

You may be diagnosed with ADHD – or with something else. Lots of adults with ADHD have other conditions like anxiety, substance abuse and depression. Any and all disorders have to be identified and treated together, otherwise, efforts to treat just the ADHD, if it exists, won't be as successful.

### **I've been diagnosed – now what?**

If you are diagnosed with ADHD, don't panic. The good news is, you've identified the problem. Your symptoms might seem overwhelming right now, but there *is* treatment. An effective treatment plan may involve several interventions at the same time. They can include medication, psychotherapy, ADHD coaching, and educating loved ones on how they can best support you. Many people with ADHD go on to lead happy and successful lives. You *can* be one of them.

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