

Adult Attention Deficit Disorder

by Don Mordasini

ARE YOU AN ADULT WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER?

Many people who have ADD are intellectually gifted, intuitive, and creative. Many function quite well until their coping skills fail under increased stress. Others, with more pronounced ADAD characteristics find life more of a struggle. ADD is like a two edged sword. The ability to hyper focus along with intellectual and/or creative gifts is offset by the "challenges" outlined below.

The latest diagnostic manual (DSM-4) list the following Attention Deficit subtypes:

1. The Inattentive Type.

This subtype is seen more frequently in women than men. Because this person does not experience physical hyperactivity, the inattentive person was usually misdiagnosed or overlooked in childhood. The primary feature of this subtype was the hyperactive brain. The restless/scanning brain unable to focus had trouble focusing, studying, paying attention, listening, and remembering because of its easy distractibility. Frequently the scanning brain seeking to calm itself would do so through obsessing on oneself or becoming hyper sensitive to internal and external stimuli.

2. The Hyperactive Impulsive Type.

This subtype is characterized by a high degree of motor activity and impulsivity. As an adult this person gets "revved up" and has trouble winding down. The hyperactive type is constantly on the move, easily bored, and highly impulsive. S/he has trouble with procrastination, disorganization, not completing projects, forgetting, and disappointing others. This impulsiveness cause the person trouble in making good decisions, waiting (i.e. jumping into projects, relationships, etc.), and shooting from the hip. Frequently, the impulsivity cause problems with emotional control and frustration tolerance.

3. The Combined Type.

This subtype has many characteristics of both the inattentive and the hyperactive type and is most frequently seen in different combinations. The combined type is the "classic" ADDer.

My clinical experience has shown me that nearly all ADDers have two major characteristics:

SCANNING/RESTLESS MIND AND/OR HYPERACTIVITY PLUS EMOTIONAL LABILITY.

Notice the PLUS in the above sentence. Most ADDers have some trouble with their emotions. Generally, they tend to be more excitable, have wider mood swings and experience lower frustration tolerance than their peers. Although the key feature of ADD is what is known as the scanning brain syndrome (this is the restless mind), they are frequently challenged by emotional swings.

A list of the areas in which the ADDer might experience difficulties looks like this:

1. Inattention, distractibility.
2. Impulsivity.
3. Overactivity/hyperactivity.
4. Noncompliance.

5. Under achievement/Disorganization.
6. Emotional Lability
7. Low frustration tolerance
8. Impaired personal or family relationships

The ADDer tends to move quickly, get bored easily, seeks stimulation (in work, relationships, thrill activities, addictions, etc..), has trouble remaining still long enough to listen, is disorganized, procrastinates and experiences mood instability. Some ADDers are high achievers because their unique hyper focus brain allows them to become successful workaholics. Others feel as though they have never lived up to their abilities. The common denominator is the restless scanning brain that seeks to calm itself through hyper focus or stimulation.

RESTLESS MIND = TENDENCY to HYPERFOCUS or seek out STIMULATION

The adult ADDer frequently has emotional challenges that make interpersonal relationships more difficult. The characteristic of inattentiveness for example can make the ADDer seem to be a poor listener, or not care for, or appear to be not interested in his/her partner. Frequently the ADDer has trouble managing anger appropriately, this stems in part from low frustration tolerance and irritability. Other ADDers may feel poorly about themselves as a result of earlier struggles, and bring dependency or intimacy problems into relationships. ADDers tend to be poor observers of themselves and may have a tendency to blame others for their problems. Frequently the characteristics of excitability, irritability, low frustration tolerance, impulsivity, and low self esteem cause the ADDer to be on an emotional roller coaster.

EMOTIONAL LABILITY= EXCITABILITY, IRRITABILITY. LOW FRUSTRATION TOLERANCE, IMPULSIVITY, LOW SELF ESTEEM, MOODINESS.

ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER is not an emotional or psychological illness as such. Rather it represents the way the brain and nervous system work. It is not uncommon however, to have ADD overlaid with depression, panic, or an anxiety disorder. For this reason it is important to get a clinical diagnosis so appropriate treatment can follow.

TREATMENT

I offer a carefully planned, positive approach to ADD in adults which includes:

Clinical History, Testing & Diagnosis.

Differential Diagnosis.

Individual Treatment Plan.

M.D. Referral to Restore Biochemical Imbalance.

Cognitive/Behavioral Training to Reduce Impulsivity and Low Frustration Tolerance

Couples and Family Counseling.