

ADHD/ADD

By Dr Ed Feraco

You may have heard the expression, “he/she has ADHD/ADD” but do you really know what this means? Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a biological brain based condition that is characterized by a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that is more frequently displayed and more severe than is typically observed in individuals at a comparable level of development. Many individuals present with symptoms of both inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity, but there are three subtypes: combined, predominantly inattentive, and predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type.

The most prevalent symptoms of ADHD/ADD are inattention and distractibility and/or hyperactive and impulsive behaviors. People with ADHD/ADD have difficulties with concentration, mental focus, and inhibition of impulses and behaviors that are chronic and pervasive and that impair their daily functioning across various settings: home, school, work, relationships, etc.

One incorrect stereotype of a person with ADHD/ADD is that they are poor learners or unaccomplished students. In reality, many bright and/or gifted persons may indeed have ADHD/ADD but have developed better coping skills to function well despite living with ADHD/ADD. Another misconception with ADHD/ADD is that children/adolescents outgrow ADHD/ADD, which is simply not true. Sometimes a therapist and/or a school officials mistake regular developmental growth as symptoms of ADHD/ADD. In these cases, the person will stop presenting with such symptoms as they mature and advance in their particular developmental stage. Some adolescents and adults do learn efficient coping skills and thus may not struggle with symptoms of ADHD/ADD. However, many adolescents do struggle with ADHD/ADD their entire life. There are two excellent books written by two psychiatrists particularly for adult: *Driven to Distraction* and *Answers to Distraction*. Dr. Ed Hallowell and Dr. John Ratey are renowned experts in the study of ADHD/ADD and both are faculty members of the University of Massachusetts’ Medical School.

Surprisingly, ADHD/ADD is not a diagnosis that is used freely in Western Europe, which leads many in the field to question whether symptoms of ADHD/ADD are simply indicative of our American culture.

No single treatment works for every individual. Some people use an elimination diet to rule out food allergies/sensitivities. Some use the Feingold diet, a specialized diet that has worked well with reducing symptoms. Some use homeopathy and naturopathic remedies that work well for them; however, it is best to seek treatment from a qualified Homeopathic and/or Naturopathic physician to ensure that one has been “prescribed” the correct botanical and/or remedy. Many use psychostimulants such as Ritalin, Adderall, Dexedrine, Concerta, etc., and/or non-stimulants such as Strattera or anti-depressants. Behavioral modification works well with children / adolescents. Acquiring time management skills enables both students and adults to function better with their debilitating symptoms. Similarly, psychotherapy also is an effective tool for addressing ADHD/ADD. Smoking during pregnancy should be avoided as it appears to increase the

risk of giving birth to a child who develops ADHD. Lead and other heavy metal exposure have been linked to ADHD.

Coping skills, nutrition, and time management are all tools one may utilize to function successfully despite the difficulties of having ADHD/ADD. Parents can effectively learn to use behavioral modification techniques from a clinician to use on their younger children and adolescents. Clinicians can work with adolescents and adults to develop and/or to refine social skills. Clinicians can also work with parents to give them techniques and tools to use on their children as well as serve as a support for the often frustrated parent of a child or adolescent with ADHD/ADD. Counseling and/or psychotherapy provides an individual with ADHD a place to process feelings and develop strategies for dealing with the effects of ADHD. ADHD often results in broken friendships, poor relationships, and a plunging self-esteem. An ADHD coach partners with their clients to create daily structure and organization while providing support and encouragement to set goals and rewards and keep them focused even when obstacles occur. Sharing with others who are going through the same situations can be a tremendous booster. One national advocacy group is Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) (<http://www.chadd.org/>) CHADD has one affiliate office in Alaska, which you may locate by searching their web site listed in this article. You can also come into our offices at IFHS and ask to speak with one of our counselors if you have questions about or are seeking help in managing ADHD/ADD.