

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

The Nature of Adult ADHD

At School

Most adults who have ADHD symptoms report a history of poor school performance. Although some people have mild cases of ADHD and are able to compensate during their educational years, most people report difficulty performing adequately in the school setting overall. As a result, 25% of adults with ADHD drop out of school, only 12% obtain a bachelor's degree, and 4% hold a professional position.

Behaviors associated with ADHD often result in lower grades, criticism from teachers, as well as parents, and sometimes, the need to repeat a grade. In addition, an ADHD student may also have a specific learning disability that further compounds any problems with learning. Hyperactive behaviors (if present) interfere with adequate learning and also generate more frequent disciplinary actions in the school setting. This history of poor school performance has often triggered additional problems in an adult with ADHD, such as oppositionality, depression, and low self esteem.

At Work

Adults with ADHD often experience career difficulties. Problems with concentration and task completion that affect school performance continue to be problems in a job setting. Individuals with adult ADHD tend to have trouble going through established channels and following "proper" procedure. In addition, they often do not perform well with rigid authority and may frequently express anger at job requirements or their supervisor. Whatever the reason, adults with ADHD tend to have fewer occupational achievements. They tend to change employers frequently and may simply quit out of boredom. Poor job performance, attention or organizational problems and/or relationship difficulties may also cause frequent job loss.

Adults with ADHD will likely benefit from predictable, consistent work routines, flexible deadlines, and projects that allow for creative involvement. One surprising research finding regarding this group is that they appear to be more likely to own their own small business. This phenomenon is likely a result of the failure of standard employment settings to address the characteristics of ADHD, combined with a need to express creative skills. For those high-functioning individuals who can sufficiently organize their own activities, small business ownership may allow them to avoid dreary routines and rigid, demanding bosses, and embrace their creativity. The presence of a supportive spouse or partner who can help manage organizational tasks and project details would likely help ensure success.

Lifestyle

As a result of various ongoing problems, adults with untreated ADHD tend to have a lower socioeconomic status, and money is often a serious concern. Frequent job changes and poor job performance may leave the finances of many ADHD adults in disarray. Impulsive tendencies and the frequent search for excitement may generate a host of problems such as numerous driving violations, car accidents (and other accidents in general), and driver's license suspension.

Research suggests that 16% of adults with ADHD have a drug abuse problem, but this rate does not distinguish between those receiving treatment and untreated adults. Most likely, the drug abuse rate is higher for untreated ADHD adults because these individuals tend to use both legal and illegal substances in an effort to self-medicate (i.e., control their symptoms). For instance, the nicotine in

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cigarettes is a central nervous stimulant, so smoking may reduce ADHD symptoms by mimicking the effects of prescription stimulants.

Adults with this disorder can be intense and appear driven to meet certain needs. However, they are often unsuccessful due to inconsistency and disorganization, making their efforts seem choppy and poorly coordinated.

3 out of 4 adults with ADHD also suffer with another disorder. Dealing with depression and anxiety symptoms complicates the picture.

Interpersonal Relationships

Individuals with adult ADHD may appear as one of two extremes: withdrawn and antisocial, preferring to spend their time alone; or overly social and unable to easily endure even brief periods of solitude. Neither of these extremes allows much room for flexibility in daily living.

Relationships of all kinds are difficult for the adult with ADHD. Impulsive comments and behaviors in combination with a notoriously short temper can cause extreme problems. The frequent lack of clear self-awareness also has poor implications for social problem solving once a concern has been identified.

Individuals with gregarious personalities may prove engaging in the early stages of involvement and many people are drawn to their creative energy. However, even these qualities, in combination with the other more difficult aspects of the disorder, prove challenging as time goes on. Family, friends, and co-workers may gradually withdraw from some of these challenging individuals. As a result, adults with ADHD tend to have higher rates of marital problems, separation and divorce.