

Do We All Have ADHD (Or Does It Just Seem Like It)?

We all have friends or coworkers who just can't seem to sit still or stay focused. "I must have undiagnosed ADHD," they joke. When you get right down to it, we've all felt restless, disorganized, or distracted at one time or another. So then, do we all just have ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)—once referred to as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)—is one of the most common disorders in childhood, affecting about 7.5 percent, according to the Mayo Clinic. But many adults with ADHD don't even realize they have the disorder. They do know that everyday tasks—from keeping appointments and getting up in the morning, to staying focused and being productive—are a real challenge.

Adults who have ADHD have had it since childhood. The Mayo clinic states that out of every three people with ADHD, one grows out of their symptoms, one has symptoms that are less severe than when they were younger, and one has persistent and significant symptoms as an adult.

In children, the symptoms of ADHD fall into three broad categories: trouble paying attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. While it's normal for all children to be inattentive, overactive and impulsive at times, these behaviors in kids with ADHD are more severe and frequent.

Symptoms

While everyone likely experiences a couple of the below symptoms from time to time, for people with ADHD, the symptoms have caused a long history of problems in their schooling and work.

According to the Mayo Clinic, adult ADHD symptoms can include:

- Trouble focusing or concentrating
- Restlessness
- Impulsivity
- Difficulty completing tasks
- Disorganization
- Frequent mood swings
- Hot temper
- Trouble coping with stress
- Unstable relationships

When it comes to diagnosing ADHD, the notion of "significant impairment" is key. Impairment refers to the ways in which the symptoms disrupt a person's life. For example, a person with ADHD may have trouble staying employed because of their inability to meet deadlines or stay focused, or they might have a whopping credit card bill because of impulsive spending. Still others might be failing college because of their symptoms, or have an unusually high amount of stress and conflict in their marriage.

ADHD is diagnosed only when a person's symptoms have significantly impaired at least two major settings in their life, such as work and family.

And since people with ADHD have had trouble ever since they were kids, if it's gone undiagnosed, many also develop low self-esteem.

Managing the Disorder

While there is no cure for ADHD, there are ways to manage it. Treatment focuses on reducing symptoms and improving quality of life. While there is still some debate about the best treatment, combining medication and counseling seems to be the most effective. Counseling for adults often includes psychotherapy and education about the disorder, as well as developing the skills to successfully manage daily tasks and responsibilities.

So while blurting out an expletive every once in a while or having a tough time organizing your schedule is certainly troublesome, it does not justify an ADHD diagnosis.

