

Myths about ADHD

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Few psychological conditions have generated more discussion in recent years than ADHD. Yet, people continue to harbor many mistaken beliefs about it.

❖ MYTH #1: ADHD isn't a real medical disorder.

ADHD has been recognized as a legitimate diagnosis by major medical, psychological, and educational organizations, including the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Education. The American Psychiatric Society recognizes ADHD as a medical disorder in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – the official mental health “bible” used by psychologists and psychiatrists.

ADHD is biologically based. Research shows that it's a result of an imbalance of chemical messengers, or neurotransmitters, within the brain. Its primary symptoms are inattention, impulsiveness, and, sometimes, hyperactivity. People with ADHD typically have a great deal of difficulty with aspects of daily life, including time management and organizational skills.

❖ MYTH #2: Children who are given special accommodations because of their ADHD are getting an unfair advantage.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that public schools address the special needs of all children with disabilities, including children with ADHD. Special accommodations, such as extra time on tests, simply level the playing field so that kids with ADHD can learn as successfully as their non-ADHD classmates.

❖ MYTH #3: Children with ADHD eventually outgrow their condition.

More than 70% of the individuals who have ADHD in childhood continue to have it in adolescence. Up to 50% will continue to have it in adulthood.

Although it's been estimated that 6% of the adult population has ADHD, the majority of those adults remain undiagnosed, and only one in four of them seek treatment. Yet, without help, adults with ADHD are highly vulnerable to depression, anxiety and substance abuse. They often experience career difficulties, legal and financial problems, and troubled personal relationships.

❖ MYTH #4: ADHD affects only boys.

Girls are just as likely to have ADHD as are boys, and gender makes no difference in the symptoms caused by the disorder. But because this myth persists, boys are more likely to be diagnosed than girls.

❖ **MYTH #5:** ADHD is the result of bad parenting.

When a child with ADHD blurts things out or gets out of their seat in class, it's not because they haven't been taught that these behaviors are wrong. It's because they cannot control their impulses. The problem is rooted in brain chemistry, not discipline. In fact, overly strict parenting – which may involve punishing a child for things out of their control – can actually make ADHD symptoms worse. Professional interventions, such as drug therapy, psychotherapy, and behavior modification therapy, are usually required.

❖ **MYTH #6:** Children who take ADHD medication are more likely to abuse drugs when they become teenagers.

Actually, it's just the opposite. Having untreated ADHD increases the risk that an individual will abuse drugs or alcohol. Appropriate treatment reduces the risk. The medications used to treat ADHD have been proven safe and effective over more than 50 years of use. These drugs don't cure ADHD, but they are highly effective at easing symptoms of the disorder. The drugs do not turn kids into addicts or “zombies.”

❖ **MYTH #7:** People who have ADHD are stupid or lazy – they never amount to anything.

Many well-known, high-achieving individuals have ADHD, including top executives such as David Neeleman, founder of JetBlue Airways, and Paul Orfalea, founder of Kinko's. Other well-known, high-achieving people with ADHD include Terry Bradshaw (Quarterback, Super Bowl winner and NFL commentator), Howie Mandel (host of “Deal or No Deal”), James Carville (prominent political consultant and commentator), and Michael Phelps (swimmer and holder of 14 career Olympic gold medals, the most by any Olympian ever).

To learn more about ADHD, go to www.additudemag.com