

Introduction to Adult ADHD

Virginia Newton, Ph.D., R.Psych.
Brentwood Psychological Services
www.brentwoodpsych.com
(780) 232-2489
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Objectives

- Learn the differences between childhood and adult ADHD
- Understand how ADHD is diagnosed in adults
- Learn about mental health conditions that might accompany adult ADHD
- Become familiar with treatment options

What is ADHD?

- ADHD = Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Diagnostic term used to describe clinically significant and pervasive problems with attention, impulsivity, and motor control
- Onset occurs during childhood (before age 12 years) and symptoms may persist into adulthood
- Symptoms cannot be explained by a different psychiatric or physical condition
- Considered to be a genetic condition

ADHD Subtypes

- Predominantly inattentive (“ADD”)
- Predominantly hyperactive/impulsive
- Combined (prominent symptoms of both inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity)

4

How ADHD Looks in Children

- Loses possessions frequently
- Has difficulty sitting still or is always “on the go”
- Talks excessively and cannot play quietly
- Has difficulty waiting turn or blurts out answers
- Interrupts or intrudes on others
- Makes careless mistakes in homework or chores
- Has problems keeping attention focused on activities
- Has trouble complete multi-step tasks independently
- Avoids tasks that involve sustained mental effort

5

How ADHD Looks in Adults

- Misses appointments and deadlines
- Procrastinates and has many unfinished projects
- Changes jobs frequently and works below potential
- Feels an inner sense of restlessness
- Is often impatient
- Engages in impulsive and intrusive behaviour
- Has problems managing anger
- May have a history of car accidents and speeding
- Has problems with consistency as a parent

6

How ADHD Looks in Adults

- Struggles with managing daily life
 - Becomes overwhelmed by the many unrelated aspects of organizing a household
 - Finds it difficult to stay on top of daily tasks
 - Has trouble with time management (e.g., planning, prioritizing, finishing tasks)
 - Has problems maintaining a balanced lifestyle (e.g., diet, exercise, sleep)

How ADHD Looks in Adults

- Symptoms of inattention and impulsivity are similar but often less obvious in adulthood (e.g., fidgety and restless versus “driven by a motor”)
- The consequences of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity can be more severe in adulthood
- However, adults can often choose environments that accommodate their symptoms (e.g., jobs that don’t require sitting still)

Diagnosis

Adult ADHD Assessment

- Can be completed by a physician or doctoral-level psychologist with appropriate training
- Should include:
 - An in-depth clinical interview
 - A collateral interview (e.g., with a parent or spouse)
 - Review of relevant records (e.g., school reports, workplace evaluations)
- Ideally, should follow the guidelines published by the Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance (CADDRA)
- Cognitive testing can be helpful to identify any specific areas of weakness but is not required

10

Adult ADHD Assessment

A good ADHD assessment will:

- Help determine whether a person is experiencing ADHD, another condition, or both
- Verify that symptoms started in early childhood
- Make sure that symptoms occur in two or more settings
- Not rely only on self-report
- Not base a diagnosis on the results of cognitive testing, neuroimaging (e.g., EEG, SPECT), or biofeedback
- Not diagnose ADHD by just using a medication trial

11

ADHD as a Diagnosis of Exclusion

A number of conditions can cause ADHD-like symptoms:

- Psychiatric disorders
 - Depression
 - Bipolar Disorder
 - Schizophrenia
 - Generalized Anxiety
 - Substance Abuse
 - Borderline Personality Disorder
- Medical illnesses
- Medication side effects

Guiding Principles for Diagnosis

- If another condition could account for symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity, then that condition should be treated first
- A reassessment for ADHD may be appropriate if any ongoing symptoms:
 - Began before age 12 years
 - Impair functioning in more than one setting

13

ADHD and Mental Health

14

ADHD and Anxiety

- About 50% of adults with ADHD have generalized anxiety
- They are at increased risk of developing social anxiety
- Anxiety may worsen problems with:
 - Self-esteem
 - Adaptive functioning
 - Stress tolerance
 - Attention and short-term memory

ADHD and Depression

- About 30% of adults with ADHD have symptoms of depression
- Shared features include:
 - Poor concentration
 - Short-term memory problems
 - Psychomotor agitation
 - Irritability
 - Insomnia

ADHD and Substance Abuse

- About half of adults with ADHD also abuse recreational substances
- Substances are often used to improve cognitive performance, regulate mood, or reduce restlessness
- Cannabis is often the drug of choice
- Stimulant abuse is not common
- Drug use may worsen mood swings and increase problems with attention and memory

Treatment

Integrated Treatment Model

An integrated approach includes:

- Education
- Medication
- Coaching
- Psychotherapy
- Lifestyle improvements

Education

- Provides an objective explanation of symptoms and problematic patterns of behaviour
- Helps to reduce feelings of blame, guilt, shame, and frustration
- Offers guidance in developing and implementing better strategies for dealing with life's challenges

Resources

Books

- *Driven to Distraction (Revised): Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder* by Edward M. Hallowell, M.D. and John J. Ratey, M.D. (2011)
- *Fast Minds: How to Thrive if You Have ADHD (or Think You Might)* by Craig Surman, M.D., Tim Bilkey, M.D., and Karen Weintraub (2013)
- *More Attention, Less Deficit: Success Strategies for Adults with ADHD* by Ari Tuckman, Ph.D., M.B.A. (2009)
- *Understand Your Brain, Get More Done: The ADHD Executive Functions Workbook* by Ari Tuckman, Ph.D., M.B.A. (2012)

Podcasts

- Attention Talk Radio (<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/attentiontalkradio>)
- More Attention, Less Deficit (<http://adultadhdbook.com>)
- Practical ADHD Strategies (<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/laurarolands>)

Resources

Websites

- A New Understanding of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (drthomasebrown.com)
- ADD Crusher (addcrusher.com)
- ADDitude Magazine (additudemag.com)
- Totally ADD (totallyadd.com)

Organizations

- ADHD Association of Greater Edmonton (adhdedmonton.com)
- Attention Deficit Disorder Association (add.org)
- Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance (caddra.ca)

22

Medication

- Psychostimulant medication is usually considered to be the first step in the medical treatment of ADHD:
 - Dexedrine, Adderall XR, Vyvanse (amphetamine)
 - Ritalin, Biphentin, Concerta XR (methylphenidate)
 - Strattera (atomoxetine)
 - Intuniv XR (guanfacine)
- However, its effectiveness depends on one's reaction to a particular medication
- Often, adults with ADHD need more than just medication to fully manage their symptoms

23

Benefits of Medication in ADHD

- Creates a sense of clarity
- Calms a busy mind
- Brings everything into focus
- Reduces mental noise
- Enhances one's ability to concentrate and reduce distractibility
- Helps time management
- Improves frustration tolerance and emotional control

24

Clinical Outcomes

With an accurate diagnosis of ADHD, medication:

- Does not provide a performance edge but may improve overall level of functioning
- Is not addictive (if appropriately prescribed and taken)
- Can reduce reliance on recreational substances
- Is not associated with cardiovascular problems
- Does not appear to have any lasting negative effects

25

Coaching

26

ADHD Coaching

- Collaborative problem-solving process
- Focuses on current practical difficulties and does not address psychiatric symptoms
- Personal strengths and weaknesses are used to devise strategies that are most likely to be helpful
- Initial in-person assessment is followed by brief daily or weekly contact (e.g., telephone, email, text)
- Coach keeps client accountable for meeting specific behavioural goals

27

Who is right for ADHD Coaching?

- Generally doing well in life except for ADHD-related struggles, but would like to do better
- Can be honest about themselves, take constructive feedback well, and apply it effectively
- Has a good sense of what to work on and goals, but can't figure out how to make the desired progress
- Has taken steps to treat anxiety, depression, substance use, or other conditions with ADHD-like symptoms

Finding a Coach

- There is no standard for training or provision of services
- However, the International Coach Federation does offer a credentialing program: www.coachfederation.org
- Parents, spouses, and significant others should not take on the coaching role
- Registered psychologists can provide coaching but should select either the coaching or therapist role

Psychotherapy

Therapy vs. Coaching

Therapy

- Treats diagnosable disorders
- Often considers how the past affects the present
- Generally does not get into practical problem solving

Coaching

- Strength based rather than pathology based
- Stays focused on the present and the future
- Focuses on how the client's ADHD affects the ability to get things done and how to overcome challenges

Therapy vs. Coaching

Therapy

- Seeks understanding (why someone has certain feelings or does certain things)
- Explores complex emotions and relationship experiences

Coaching

- Seeks tangible accomplishments
- Focuses on pragmatic strategies and necessary steps to meet goals
- Creates customized systems to help the client

Psychotherapy

- Individual therapy is often effective for the treatment for ADHD symptoms as well as co-occurring conditions such as anxiety and depression
- Can include anger management and social skills training
- Family or couples therapy can also be helpful to address potential misunderstandings between family members, and build a sense of emotional support
- The effectiveness of psychotherapy may depend on the personality fit between therapist and client

Psychotherapy

- **Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT):** Uses rational problem solving to challenge and change unhelpful thoughts and behaviours, thus improving emotional regulation.
- **Behavioural therapy:** Uses behavioural strategies to foster changes in thinking and emotion. May be better than CBT for those who are too impulsive to slow down and use rational self-talk.
- **Mindfulness-based therapies:** Reduces emotional reactivity by developing the ability to focus one's attention on the present moment.

Finding a Psychologist

- Psychologists' Association of Alberta referral service (www.psychologistsassociation.ab.ca)
- Psychology Today (www.psychologytoday.com/ca)
- Momentum Walk-In Counselling Society (www.momentumcounselling.org)
- Availability of registered psychologists through Alberta Health Services is limited
 - Primary care networks may include psychologists
 - AHS mental health therapists may or may not be trained in psychotherapy

Lifestyle Improvements

Everyday, EYES

- Exercise
- Yoga or meditation
- Eat right
- Sleep enough. How much sleep is enough? Enough so that you wake up without an alarm clock.

Brain Training Programs

- Cogmed Working Memory Training: A computer-based program that develops the mind's ability to hold and process information in the short term. Considered to be "possibly efficacious" for the treatment of ADHD.
- Other software programs (e.g., Lumosity, Brain Gym) have not yet shown generalizability in terms of improved cognitive skills
- Neuromodulation approaches (e.g., SPECT, TMS, neurofeedback) have also produced mixed results

Academic Accommodations

- General academic support (e.g., tutoring, study skills development) is usually available through the institution's student services office
- Formal accommodations are typically arranged through the institution's students with disabilities office. Requires clinical documentation of the diagnosis
- Examples include extended time on tests, testing in a separate and quiet location, having a note taker in class, a reduced course load, permission to record lectures, and priority registration

Occupational Accommodations

- In Canada, employers have a duty to accommodate without undue hardship
- Employers are entitled to relevant information that supports the need for and helps identify suitable accommodations
- Appropriate accommodations are chosen jointly by the employer and employee
- Examples include scheduled breaks, a quiet working environment, permission to wear ear plugs or headphones during times where increased concentration is needed, and modified work hours

40

Summary

- Symptoms of inattention or hyperactivity do not always mean that a person has ADHD
- ADHD should only be explored as a potential diagnosis after other conditions have been ruled out or managed
- A diagnosis of ADHD should only be made after thorough medical and psychological assessment
- Effective medication and psychological treatments are available

41

Questions



42
