

# Focus on ADHD

*By Darcy Lewis*

**A look at a disorder affecting people of both sexes and all ages—including teens**

Jake, 15, always wondered whether anyone in his geometry class noticed that he rarely handed in his homework on time. Eight-year-old Maria didn't have to wonder whether her classmates noticed her wiggling in class—they couldn't help but notice, and they let her know it too. Even a 40-year-old office worker named Eric had to admit he wasn't always as organized and on time as he ought to be.

What do those people, and millions more like them, have in common? It's attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a lifelong condition that affects people of both sexes and all ages.

People with ADHD often have problems getting organized, staying on task, controlling their impulses, and managing time effectively. "Problems in daily life are what define ADHD," explains psychologist Gregory Fabiano. He's an associate professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Buffalo in New York. Basically, a person with ADHD is more inattentive than, or doesn't control his or her impulses as well as, what's expected of someone his or her age. "We all have bad days, but if your grades are dropping or teachers, parents, or friends get annoyed with you because you're often forgetful or late, you might have ADHD."

If you do have ADHD, you have a lot of company. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 9.5 percent of kids ages 4 to 17 (that's 5.4 million kids) have received ADHD diagnoses. That number is higher than it once was. In recent years, more teens have been identified with the disorder, probably because people are learning that teens can have ADHD too.

That is good news to Dr. Patricia Quinn, a pediatrician and director of the National Center for Girls and Women with AD/HD in Washington, D.C. "It's important for teens with ADHD to get treated because they have more responsibilities and pressures than younger kids," she says. "ADHD absolutely affects decision-making skills, so the stakes get higher once things like dating, driving, and jobs enter the picture."

Here are some myths you might have heard about ADHD—and the truth.

**Myth: If you're not hyper, you don't have ADHD.**

Sure, some people fit the ADHD stereotype of being a nonstop bundle of energy with a mile-a-minute mouth. They tend to stand out when their constant motion becomes disruptive. But other people have the inattentive form of ADHD, which means that their challenges are likely to include being organized, not becoming easily distracted, and controlling impulses, not hyperactivity.

**Myth: Girls don't have ADHD.**

Quinn hears that a lot, even though the CDC found that 5.6 percent of girls have received an ADHD diagnosis. Instead of being hyperactive, which is hard for teachers and parents to miss, "girls tend to be inattentive, so they can get overlooked," she explains. "They also have more depression and anxiety from figuring out ways to compensate."

Gender differences in the way boys and girls respond to symptoms—and try to make up for them—can also contribute to the perception that girls aren't often affected by ADHD.

**Myth: Smart kids don't have ADHD.**

Kayte Pietrick, a 20-year-old from Winnetka, Ill., used to think she wasn't smart because of her ADHD. "I didn't do well in school and was in a lower-level math class," she says. "But I finally learned how to work with my ADHD in high school and graduated with honors. Now I know I'm just as smart as anyone else."

Experts believe that being smart and having ADHD means you're more likely to figure out coping strategies on your own, at least for a while. That's what 15-year-old Conor M. of Virginia did. "I'm pretty smart, so I could skate by until middle school, when it got harder to stay organized," he explains. "Then things went downhill even more in freshman year, which is when I got my ADHD diagnosis."

**Myth: People who have ADHD don't really need medication for it.**

As ADHD has become more widely diagnosed, some parents and teachers have worried that medications such as methylphenidate (also known by its brand names, which include Ritalin) are prescribed too often. Or they believe that ADHD can be controlled simply by trying harder. But ADHD, like other disorders, is serious and should be treated. "Many types of ADHD treatments have been tried," says Fabiano. "But only two have been shown to work: medication and behavior modification," which is learning new ways of doing things. "Most people get the best results when they do both," he adds.

**Myth: Having ADHD means a person won't find success in life.**

The Internet is full of lists of celebrity entertainers, billionaires, and scientists who learned to deal with ADHD on the way to huge successes. If you're one of the millions of teens with ADHD, you could one day make the list too! "ADHD does not need to limit anyone's possibilities in life, but people do need to learn to manage it instead of letting it manage them," says Quinn.

That means figuring out your strengths and adapting as needed. "ADHD is a lifelong condition, so it can be a game of Whac-A-Mole—as soon as you get one issue under control, another pops up," Fabiano says. "But when you really understand what you do well, you can figure out new solutions that will take you where you want to be."

**Inside****Three young people share what ADHD is really like.**

"I have a lot of impulsivity and am really talkative but try to turn it down. Some people are pretty tolerant, but others get kind of harsh about it. So I try to be as calm as I can, but it's hard."

—Conor M., 15, Virginia

"Concentrating is hard because there's always a million things going through my head. I can't seem to keep anything in my brain for more than a few seconds before it slips away, but I'm used to it now."

—Carson B., 17, North Carolina

"Kids with ADHD see many different ways to learn and solve problems. If I didn't have ADHD, I probably wouldn't be nearly as creative as I am today."

—Kayte Pietrick, 20, Illinois

**What Should I Do?**

Diagnosing ADHD is not a do-it-yourself project. If you think you may have ADHD, ask your parents to make an appointment with your doctor or a psychologist who is knowledgeable about ADHD. You can also ask a teacher or a counselor for advice. "Find a trusted adult, and persist until you have been heard," says Dr. Patricia Quinn, a pediatrician. "Don't dismiss your suspicions. You deserve the help."

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. People with ADHD often have problems with all of the following EXCEPT
  - A getting organized
  - B staying on task
  - C controlling impulses
  - D being too focused
  
2. This passage includes a list of myths about ADHD. What do all of the examples in the list have in common?
  - A The examples describe why the myths are mostly true.
  - B The examples dispel each false myth with the truth.
  - C The examples explain how some of the myths are true.
  - D The examples tell why each myth contains a nugget of truth.
  
3. After reading the passage, what can you conclude about ADHD?
  - A Exercise could have prevented most people from getting ADHD.
  - B An ADHD diagnosis can help people with the disorder get help.
  - C Teenagers with ADHD are hyperactive and disruptive in school.
  - D ADHD can be completely cured with the right medications.
  
4. Read these sentences from the passage: "Instead of being hyperactive, which is hard for teachers and parents to miss, 'girls tend to be inattentive, so they can get overlooked,' she explains. 'They also have more depression and anxiety from figuring out ways to compensate.'"

In this sentence, the word **compensate** means

  - A to offset one's shortcomings
  - B to flaunt a new skill or talent
  - C to continue in a downward spiral
  - D to increase one's earnings
  
5. Which statement best describes the main idea of the passage?
  - A Dr. Patricia Quinn is a pediatrician and expert on teenagers with ADHD.
  - B ADHD is a lifelong condition that affects people of both sexes and all ages.
  - C Many celebrity entertainers have learned to deal with ADHD and succeed.
  - D The CDC found that 5.6 percent of girls have received an ADHD diagnosis.

6. According to the CDC report, how many kids ages 4 to 17 have received ADHD diagnoses?

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7. How might 15-year-old Conor M. of Virginia have felt when he got diagnosed with ADHD? Please cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Kayte Pietrick ended up graduating high school with honors \_\_\_\_\_ she learned how to work with her ADHD.

- A or
- B after
- C until
- D finally

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Because they are often forgetful or late, teens with ADHD might notice people getting annoyed with them.

Who? teens with ADHD

(might do) What? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

10. **Vocabulary Word:** modification: a change made.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_