

## **Adults Dealing With Untreated ADD/ADHD**

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

People who have Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder as adults are not suddenly stricken with the illness. Adults do not develop ADD/ADHD through multi-tasking, being overwhelmed, or drinking too much coffee. Adults that have ADD/ADHD had ADD/ADHD as a child. It just went undiagnosed.

When as an adult, you discover that you do have ADD/ADHD, the simple fact of a diagnosis and perhaps medication, does not "cure" the impact that ADD/ADHD has had on your life.

The symptoms associated with ADD/ADHD that you have lived with, adjusted to, and compensated for, have had far reaching effects on various aspects of your life. You may be feeling relieved that you finally have a diagnosis and that it all makes sense now. However, you have adjusted to ADD/ADHD as a constant in your life in all kinds of ways--some for better; some for worse.

Possible physical effects of untreated ADD/ADHD could involve simple things as not being able to follow a medication regimen, forgetting or avoiding checkups and doctor visits, accidents, injuries, and neglect of self-care. Possible mental health effects of untreated ADD/ADHD could involve frustration, disappointment, low self-esteem, inability to make decisions, anxiety, unmanaged stress, and poor social awareness. Compulsive behavior, such as compulsive eating, substance abuse, and other addictions may develop around the need to self-medicate uncomfortable feelings.

Many adults with ADD/ADHD find that they have been handicapped by their illness in their careers. Many had a great deal of difficulty getting through high school, then college. As an adult you may feel that you have not been working up to your potential, that you are stagnating or stuck, and that others do not seem to really see how bright or hard working you are actually are. You may have trouble following the rules at work or following a chain of command. You may have even struggled to maintain a job, to learn new tasks and skills required of your job, or to be able to consistently show up on time for work, meet deadlines, or complete tasks in a timely manner. You may have financial difficulties where you cannot figure out what happens to make your bills late, to be unable to manage money, or how to quit impulsively or compulsively spending.

As you look at the examples above, does it seem so unrealistic that you might also have relationship problems that continue to haunt you? ADD/ADHD carries with a lot of symptoms that tremendously impacts your most important relationships. When you cannot keep track of time, instead of understanding that that is a symptom of your ADD, your family members have a tendency to see you as "irresponsible". When you have a hard focusing enough to pay attention in a conversation, or even interrupt

before someone else has a chance to finish their story, they perceive you as insensitive, rude, not interested enough to really listen, and having no interest in them. When you have major organizational issues, others may believe that you don't care how messy something is, or that you expect others to pick up after you. They may see your inability to keep appointments, be on time, keep track of important papers or items as a lackadaisical attitude. Others may feel compelled to pick up the slack for you or to "remind", "nag", or "instruct" you in day to day living tasks. In the process they feel angry and hurt, and believe that if they were important to you, you would pay more attention to these details yourself.

Let the impact of your untreated ADD/ADHD inform and drive your adult treatment of it. Look at the impact on various aspects of your life--your physical health, your emotional health (including self-esteem and self-efficacy), and your interpersonal behavioral health. Identify areas in your life most affected by your ADD/ADHD and develop goals and objectives to correct or reduce the damage that still permeates your life.

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