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3 Myths About ADHD

By: Jaclyn Rink, MSCP, LLP

There's a lot of misinformation out there about ADHD. Here are some of my favorite myths to clear up as a provider who has over ten years diagnosing ADHD via comprehensive neuropsychological assessments.

1. **ADHD is a lack of attention.**
   ADHD is the opposite of a lack of attention. It is an OVER attention to environmental and cognitive stimuli without the necessary inhibitory skills to filter out irrelevant vs. relevant stimuli. Given the number of different stimuli being processed at one time, it can be challenging for people with ADHD to remain focused even after they realize what IS relevant. Those with ADHD are constantly having to re-adjust their attention, which can quickly lead to cognitive fatigue and sensory overload, given the amount of stimuli that enters their attentional field at once. In contrast, people with ADHD often report intense periods of hyperfocus, where they struggle to break/transition attention when necessary. ADHD does not mean that someone cannot focus, it means that their ability to focus is inconsistent and unreliable from moment to moment.

2. **You can outgrow ADHD**
   ADHD is neurodevelopmental, meaning that it is a diagnosis that impacts the growth of the brain during early years of development and is present at birth. We do not outgrow ADHD, and we don't "get" ADHD in adulthood. If someone receives an ADHD diagnosis as an adult, ADHD has always been there, but sadly, it went undetected. ADHD is as part of your genetic makeup as your eye color. Although ADHD will always be present, one's individual symptom presentation can change over time. By adulthood, many people will no longer meet criteria for hyperactive symptoms, and have likely built and integrated coping mechanisms and compensatory strategies into their daily lives that lessen the impact of their symptoms (e.g., use of reminder strategies, assistive technology tools, hands-on careers, etc.)

3. **Females are less likely to have ADHD**
   Men and women have the same prevalence rate for ADHD in adulthood. However, young girls are diagnosed at half the rate of young boys, meaning we are underdiagnosing and missing girls that are struggling with ADHD symptoms. This is often because girls are more likely to present with inattentive features of ADHD versus hyperactive. Young girls are often undiagnosed because they are not disrupting their environment or stand out behaviorally. They are often quietly compensating behind the scenes for their weaknesses, working super hard and internalizing their struggles. Girls often receive a different narrative for their symptoms due to societal implications. People may label these girls as being emotional (e.g., hormonal), immature, weird, shy, high-achieving or even classify them as a social butterfly who has a variety of interests. It's important that we check in with our young girls to truly understand the fundamental cause for their behaviors/struggles and seek further evaluation when possible. ADHD is highly comorbid with mood disorders such as anxiety and depression, especially when left untreated.

If you suspect that your child, a student, or even yourself may have ADHD, consider seeking/suggesting a neuropsychological evaluation or further consultation with a provider that specializes in ADHD.