

10 Myths and Facts about Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD/ADHD)

from Attention Deficit Disorder: The Unfocused Mind in Children and Adults,
by Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D. Associate Director of the Yale Clinic for Attention and
Related Disorders (Yale University Press, 2005)

MYTH: *ADD is just a lack of willpower. Persons with ADD focus well on things that interest them; they could focus on any other tasks if they really wanted to.*

FACT: ADD looks very much like a willpower problem, but it isn't. It's essentially a chemical problem in the management systems of the brain.

MYTH: *ADD is a simple problem of being hyperactive or not listening when someone is talking to you.*

FACT: ADD is a complex disorder that involves impairments in focus, organization, motivation, emotional modulation, memory, and other functions of the brain's management system.

MYTH: *Brains of persons with ADD are overactive and need medication to calm down.*

FACT: Underactivity of the brain's management networks is typical of persons with ADD. Effective medications increase alertness and improve communication in the brain's management system.

MYTH: *ADD is simply a label for behavior problems; children with ADD just refuse to sit still and are unwilling to listen to teachers or parents.*

FACT: Many with ADD have few behavior problems, Chronic inattention symptoms cause more severe and longer-lasting problems for learning and relationships for those with ADD.

MYTH: *Those who have ADD as children usually outgrow it as they enter their teens.*

FACT: Often ADD impairments are not very noticeable until the teen years, when more self-management is required in school and elsewhere. And ADD may be subtle, but more disabling during adolescence than in childhood.

MYTH: *Unless you have been diagnosed with ADD as a child, you can't have it as an adult.*

FACT: Many adults have struggled all their lives with unrecognized ADD impairments. They haven't received help because they assumed that their chronic difficulties, like depression or anxiety, were caused by other impairments that did not respond to the usual treatments.

MYTH: *Everybody has the symptoms of ADD, and anyone with adequate intelligence can overcome these difficulties.*

FACT: ADD affects persons of all levels of intelligence. And although everyone sometimes has symptoms of ADD, only those with chronic impairments from these symptoms warrant an ADD diagnosis.

MYTH: *Someone can't have ADD and also have depression, anxiety, or other psychiatric problems.*

FACT: A person with ADD is six times more likely to have another psychiatric or learning disorder than most other people. ADD usually overlaps with other disorders.

MYTH: *Medications for ADD are likely to cause longer-term problems with substance abuse or other health concerns, especially when used by children.*

FACT: The risks of using appropriate medications to treat ADD are minimal, whereas the risks of not using medication to treat ADD are significant. The medications used for ADD are among the best researched for any disorder.

MYTH: *ADD doesn't really cause much damage to a person's life.*

FACT: Untreated or inadequately treated ADD syndrome often severely impairs learning, family life, education, work life, social interactions, and driving safely. Most of those with ADD who receive adequate treatment, however, function quite well.

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