

Myths & Facts About Adult ADHD

By Ariane Benefit, M.S.Ed.



One of the most common myths about Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is that ADHD is a childhood disorder that is outgrown. The truth is that ADHD is not outgrown; instead the traits often become less obvious or they transform. For example, physical hyperactivity may manifest as mental hyperactivity in adults. Below is a list of several other common myths and facts about ADHD. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is a general term that has been used to describe ADHD. This fact sheet will refer to ADHD unless an author specifically uses ADD in cited references.

MYTH	FACT
People with ADHD can't pay attention to anything.	People with ADHD actually can pay attention quite well. A more accurate description may be that people with ADHD pay attention to too many things. They also often have difficulty controlling how they shift attention from one thing to the next. This can cause them to have difficulty sustaining attention sometimes, but at other times, they may hyperfocus for long periods of time and have difficulty stopping what they are doing in order to do something else. They may become so focused that they forget to take breaks and may even forget to eat or go to the bathroom.
People with ADHD rarely accomplish or complete anything.	The truth is that people with ADHD often accomplish quite a bit, but it may take them much longer to do some things because they have difficulty completing tasks without getting distracted or losing interest. This is because the ADHD brain is hardwired to seek out novelty and identify patterns, so they tend to jump around from one thing to the next. Often, they need the energy and support of other people to help them counteract this tendency and stay focused. However, in the right environment, with appropriate support and strategies in place to help them recover from distraction episodes, or when allowed to hyperfocus in a productive manner on a project until it is done, many people with ADHD accomplish a great deal. In fact, many accomplished inventors, artists and entrepreneurs have ADHD. Some famous people with ADHD include: Howie Mandel, Woody Harrelson, Michael Phelps, Ty Pennington, Albert Einstein, JetBlue Airways founder David Neeleman, Virgin Airlines founder Richard Branson and many more.

<p>People with ADHD are extremely hyperactive and can never sit still.</p>	<p>There are some hallmark traits of ADHD such as distractibility and difficulty with postponing tasks and doing them later, but in fact, many people with ADHD do not exhibit hyperactivity. The hyperactive myth probably persists because hyperactivity is one of the most easily observable traits of ADHD in children. However, there are actually several sub-types of ADHD.</p> <p>Though still somewhat controversial, Daniel Amen, MD, in his book, <i>Healing ADD</i>, determined that there are at least six major types of ADD based on SPECT brain scans he conducted on children. SPECT is a nuclear medicine technique called "single photon emission computed tomography."</p> <p>The six types of ADD identified by Dr. Amen are:</p> <p>Type 1 -- Classic ADD. All of the hallmark traits of ADD, including hyperactivity, impulsivity, disorganization, distractibility and difficulty in concentrating.</p> <p>Type 2 -- Inattentive ADD. All of the hallmark features of ADD, but instead of hyperactivity, there is low energy.</p> <p>Type 3 -- Overfocused ADD. All of the hallmark features of ADD, in addition to negative thoughts and behaviors, such as opposition and arguing.</p> <p>Type 4 -- Temporal Lobe ADD. The hallmark features of ADD, plus irritability, aggressiveness, and memory and learning problems.</p> <p>Type 5 -- Limbic ADD. Combines ADD with depression, low energy and decreased motivation.</p> <p>Type 6 -- The Ring of Fire. Cross between ADD and bipolar disorder. Characterized by moodiness, aggressiveness and anger.</p> <p>Currently however, the <i>Diagnostic & Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)</i> used by psychologists, psychiatrists and pediatricians to diagnose ADHD officially recognizes only three types which reflect a combination of inattention symptoms and hyperactivity-impulsivity symptoms. For someone to be diagnosed with ADHD, the behaviors must have lasted for at least six months, and be severe enough to significantly disrupt the individual's quality of life.</p> <p>Inattention symptoms include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Difficulties staying on task or completing tasks – Difficulty following or understanding instructions for tasks / systems designed by someone else – Dislike for routine tasks – Being distractible or forgetful – Losing things
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	<p>Hyperactivity-impulsivity symptoms include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fidgeting – Getting up often when seated – Talking excessively or out of turn – Interrupting <p>Based on the above criteria, the DSM-IV identifies three subtypes of ADHD:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ADHD, Combined Type: Both inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity symptoms. 2. ADHD, Predominantly Inattentive Type: Inattention but not hyperactivity-impulsivity symptoms. 3. ADHD, Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type: Hyperactivity-impulsivity but not inattention symptoms.
<p>The only way to manage ADHD is medication.</p>	<p>While medication can be helpful, it is only one of many ways to manage the traits of ADHD. Other strategies for managing ADHD include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Designing a life that builds on one’s strengths and downplays one’s challenges. For example, a person with ADHD can choose a career that allows movement from one project to another. Examples are acting, consulting, sports, art, photography, science, writing or medicine. In fact, many renowned medical professionals have ADHD and are accomplished writers as well. – Exercise is a great strategy for providing the stimulation the brain needs to function more effectively. – Learn skills and strategies that do not come naturally such as effective decision-making, prioritizing, organizing principles, communication and self-monitoring of behavior. – Join a support group that helps the individual feel more understood and generate ideas and strategies to work with or work around his / her differences. – Get appropriate support to delegate chores that are difficult for the individual. – Create a structure and design daily routines that simplify life and allow the individual to focus on personal strengths. For example, hire a professional organizer, a personal assistant, cleaning service or bookkeeper. – Channel high energy into productive outlets that interest the individual.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop a sense of self-acceptance and humor about personal quirks and flaws. Embrace who you are and acknowledge weaknesses while emphasizing strengths. – Instead of asking why you are the way you are, use more productive questions such as “What is needed to...” and “How can I ...” to engage the problem-solving brain instead of the critical brain. – Learn to expect mood cycles and changes that are more frequent and more extreme than the average. According to Dr. Edward Hallowell, in his article, <i>Adult ADHD: 50 Tips on Management</i>, individuals with ADHD should “Focus rather on learning to tolerate a bad mood, knowing that it will pass, and learning strategies to make it pass sooner.” See Dr. Hallowell’s complete article here: http://www.addresources.org/article_50_adhd_tips_adult_hallowell_rat_ey.php
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About the Author

[Ariane Benefit M.S.Ed.](#), is an Organizing and ADHD Coach. She is the founder of [Neat & Simple Organizing Services](#), and [Lotus Bridge, LLC](#), an educational publishing website dedicated to providing personal growth and development resources to help people overcome lifelong issues with disorganization. Ariane is dedicated to helping people design a lifestyle that works for ADHD and/or highly creative personality types.



In addition to blogging and writing books, Ariane leads an innovative, ongoing coaching group and teleclass series called “Getting Unstuck.”

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