



Having ADHD Can Be a Good Thing!

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

Published

November 24th, 2008

Place the palm of your hand over your forehead. The area behind the palm is the frontal lobe of your brain. It houses executive function which is similar to the principal of a school setting the direction for the body and telling it how to behave. According to research, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is associated with abnormalities in the white and gray matter of this area of the brain.

Some studies claim that 3-10% of children and 1-6% of adults are diagnosed with a type of ADHD. Boys are 3 times more likely than girls to have this disorder.

Years ago, individuals were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV-TR*, which is published by the American Psychiatric Association, however, has now identified criteria for three types of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Inattentive type refers to difficulty with focusing and concentration. Those who meet these criteria can be distracted easily from their work and tend to not be able to finish a task without cues from others.

Those meeting criteria for Hyperactivity type often are in trouble at home, school or in society. Their behaviours can be high risk, compulsive, impulsive, loud and action filled. They can result in consequences involving visits to the principal's office or time-out situations or even involvement with the police and court systems.

Combined type refers to a disorder with both inattentive and hyperactive aspects. Individuals with this diagnosis are very active and also have problems with attention. They generally do not do very well in the school setting and life can be very difficult for them academically and socially.

Adult ADHD is not usually as recognized as it is in children. Often, as an individual ages s/he learns coping strategies to deal with problems of the disorder. Also, the behaviours of ADHD can present as ones that are valued in society at times. For example, excitement, eagerness and charisma are traits that employers will hire in the hopes of having an enthusiastic employee.

One of my psychology supervisors told me about an individual who was so appealing to prospective employers that he could easily convince them to hire him. He was easily bored and did not have the ability to be interested in the work for the long-term and therefore would quit the jobs after a few weeks. He had 26 jobs in one year's time.

Dr. Russell A. Barkley, of the University of Massachusetts Medical Center is an expert in this field. He refers to ADHD as "time blindness" meaning that the individual does not have any natural internal sense of time. S/he therefore tends to feel that life is moving too slowly. Because of the inability to understand and measure time, when asked to do a task the individual may either not finish within the time frame or make many mistakes because they rushed through it.

ADHD can be treated with medication, natural products and/or development of strategies to overcome challenges. Teachers and parents will benefit from learning about ADHD symptoms, enhancing the child's environment and assisting the child with self-management techniques.

Clinical psychologists are trained to work with individuals who have ADHD. Although many in our society consider ADHD to be a disability, psychologists can help the client to realize that it can also be viewed and valued as a gift!

It is not what we have that matters as much as what we do with it!