

can we have your **ATTENTION,** **PLEASE?**

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), once thought to be confined to children, is making life difficult for millions of adults. **Are you one of them?**

When you think of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, you most likely associate it with children who struggle to concentrate at school – the ones who fidget in class or run riot at birthday parties, but who eventually grow out of it (or are medicated to treat the symptoms). But the reality is that 60% of children with ADHD will still have symptoms as adults, according to the American National Resource Centre on ADHD, making it a very real problem for those who haven't been able to 'grow out of it'.

ADHD is caused by an imbalance of neurotransmitter activity in areas of the brain that control how long we are able to pay attention to any particular subject. For adults who are unable to stay focused, this inability to concentrate can have detrimental effects on their careers, ambitions and relationships.

'Not every person with ADHD displays all of the symptoms, nor do they experience symptoms to the same level of severity. Some people have mild ADHD, while others are more severely affected, resulting in significant impairments,' says the Resource Centre. It adds that there is no single medical, physical or genetic test for

ADHD. However, a diagnostic evaluation can be provided by a qualified mental health-care professional with clinical guidelines for diagnosis of ADHD, which are provided in the World Psychiatric Association diagnostic manual. These established guidelines are widely used in research and clinical practice.

What's the difference between ADD and ADHD?

According to the Attention Deficit Disorder Association: 'The difference is mainly one of terminology. The "official" clinical diagnosis is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD. Many people use the term ADD as a generic term for all types of ADHD. The term ADD has gained popularity with the general public and in the media, and is even commonly used among professionals. Whether we call it ADD or ADHD, however, we are all basically referring to the same thing.'

Symptoms of adult ADHD

'The presentation of ADHD in adults is different to the symptoms experienced by children,' says Johannesburg psychiatrist Dr Shabeer Jeeva.



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'Adults with ADHD usually suffer from anxiety, depression, drug abuse, bipolar disorder, anger, frustration and personality disorders like antisocial behaviour.' Other manifestations include poor time management and organisational skills, an inability to relax and severe mood swings. But, despite these very concrete symptoms, Dr Jeeva says that 'in South Africa, adult ADHD has been poorly diagnosed and there is still a belief among doctors and medical aids that adult ADHD does not exist'.

What makes things even trickier is that many adults have no idea that they have ADHD until they seek help for another problem, such as anxiety, depression, problems at work or

relationship difficulties. To diagnose the disorder, doctors have to be able to verify that it was present during childhood – the symptoms must be pervasive, long term and 'must create a real handicap in at least two areas of a person's life, such as school, home, work or social settings', according to the Attention Deficit Disorder Association.



EVA LONGORIA

WILL SMITH

CAMERON DIAZ

LIV TYLER

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

famous people with ADHD

I've been diagnosed, now what?

Once diagnosed, treatment of the disorder begins with hope, write Dr John Ratey and Dr Edward Hallowell in their book *Driven to Distraction*. 'Most people who discover they have the disorder, whether they are children or adults, have suffered a great deal of pain. The emotional experience of ADHD is filled with embarrassment, humiliation and self-castigation. By the time the diagnosis is made, many people

have lost confidence in themselves. Many have consulted with numerous specialists, only to find no real help.'

Counselling for ADHD focuses on getting organised, setting helpful routines, repairing relationships, and improving social skills. People with ADHD may be able to boost their performance in the workplace through job coaching or mentoring. The mentor will help with organisation skills, such as taking notes, keeping a daily planner and prioritising a to-do list. Patients may also do better in a quiet workspace with few distractions.

Does diet make a difference?

Some experts believe foods that provide quality brain fuel could reduce symptoms. High-protein foods, including nuts, meat, beans and eggs, may improve concentration. Replacing simple carbohydrates with complex carbohydrates, like whole-grain pasta or brown rice, can help ward off mood swings and stabilise energy levels.

Is there a cure?

Adults with ADHD don't outgrow the condition, but many learn to manage it successfully. Long-term treatment can reduce problems at home and at work, bringing patients closer to their families and their professional goals.

'ADHD symptoms can be channelled positively with the help of others, and used to your advantage by nurturing the positive and cushioning the negative. With treatment, you can overcome the difficulties and you can be very successful,' concludes Dr Jeeva. ❖

- **Paris Hilton** was diagnosed with ADHD when she was a child and has been on medication ever since. After a drunken driving incident that sent her to jail in 2007, she told Larry King she had the disorder.

- **Michelle Rodriguez** said in a 2006: 'I want to write and direct, but it's not easy with ADHD. I have a hard time focusing when I'm alone. But I'm nervous of taking medication. I don't really want to depend on anything to control my brain.'

- In a 2008 interview, **Cameron Diaz** said: 'I have no interest in directing movies or producing movies. I like my role in making films. It's the perfect amount of involvement for me. I have ADHD. I would never be able to spend two years making a movie, or even one year. I'd be some place else within a few short moments.'

- **Hillary Duff** was diagnosed at age seven with ADHD, and has been on Ritalin ever since. She confesses that without her medication she becomes extremely hyperactive.

- **Avril Lavigne** was diagnosed with ADHD as a child and took Ritalin for a few years, but stopped at 12 years old because she hated needing a medication to act normally. She was known as the wild girl 'Avie' for disturbing classes, fighting and being kicked out of school three times. At age 15 she decided to go back on her medication.

- **Eva Longoria** revealed that she was taking Ritalin for her ADHD after a *Desperate Housewives* plot showed a character with a Ritalin addiction.

- **Will Smith** told *Rolling Stone* magazine that he has ADHD.

- **Justin Timberlake** told Collider.com that he has adult ADHD mixed with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). He explained that, having the two disorders together has 'presented a challenge', but that he has not allowed it to hinder his success.

- **Liv Tyler** was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia at the age of 14 years. She has been on Ritalin ever since.

ADHD and your relationships

'ADHD in a family member causes stress for the entire family,' write Dr Arthur Robin and Eleanor Payson, licensed marital and family therapists, in their study on the impact of ADHD on marriage. However, stress levels may be higher for women than men because they bear more responsibility for their home and children. 'In addition, recent research suggests that husbands of women with ADHD are less tolerant of their spouse's ADHD patterns than wives of men with ADHD.'

Chronic stress – as is associated with ADHD – takes its toll on women, affecting them both physically and psychologically. 'Women who suffer from chronic stress, like that associated with ADHD, are more at risk for diseases related to chronic stress such as fibromyalgia,' write Dr Gail Rodin and Dr Jerry Littman in their book *Understanding Women with ADHD*.