Recognizing and Overcoming the Symptoms of Fatigue With ADHD

by AMY MANLEY

Tired of ADHD Fatigue?

When you think about ADHD, the last thing you probably think about is fatigue, yet fatigue is a common symptom of ADHD that can make daily living difficult for those who suffer from it. Many times, people are misdiagnosed due to the fatigue they experience, often leading to treatment that is ineffective because the real problem is ADHD that is left undiagnosed.

By learning more about fatigue from ADHD and similar issues that can affect the quality of your life, you can better understand what exactly may be affecting you.

ADHD and Fatigue – By the Numbers

If it seems like you're alone, fighting ADHD and sleepiness, know that you're not! In fact, there's a growing abundance of studies that indicate that fatigue is a legit symptom of ADHD.

A 2006 study in *Sleep* found that children with ADHD had higher rates of daytime sleepiness than their counterparts without ADHD.

Another study found that up to 50 percent of kids with ADHD had symptoms of sleep-disordered breathing, while children without ADHD were only affected at a rate of 22 percent.

It is thought that sleep problems may make ADHD problems worse – in a 2006 study in *Journal of Sleep Research,* researchers found that treating sleep problems actually eliminated ADHD in some kids.

Psychiatry Research found that sleep problems were also common in adults with ADHD. In this study, researchers compared participants who also had narcolepsy, hypersomnia, and ADHD and found that symptoms overlapped, indicating that ADHD may be misdiagnosed in some adults.

The 4 Types of Sleep Disturbances Associated With ADHD

There are a variety of types of sleep disturbances out there, but there are four types that are most common with ADHD. A sleep disturbance can likely cause fatigue. Here is a short discussion about the four common sleep disturbances:

1. **Initiation insomnia**: this type of sleep disturbance occurs in three-fourths of adults with ADHD. This is when the person who has ADHD cannot "shut off their brain" to fall asleep when it is bedtime. This can happen for a variety of reasons – they get a burst of energy, they begin to worry, their mind begins to wander, for example. This sleep disorder can prompt an inaccurate diagnosis of bipolar disorder.
2. **Restless sleep**: this type of sleep occurs when the person who has ADHD is able to fall asleep, but the sleep is not restful. The person tosses and turns, they wake up to small noises, they kick off the blankets

and are typically just as tired when they wake up as when they went to bed.

3. **Difficulty waking**: more than 80 percent of adults with ADHD suffer from this sleep disturbance, which is characterized by multiple awakenings before 4 am. Then, they fall into a very deep sleep and are difficult to rouse, often sleeping through alarms and coaxing of loved ones.
4. **Intrusive sleep**: also called “EEG negative narcolepsy,” this is characterized by “a sudden intrusion of theta waves into the alpha and beta rhythms of alertness.” This means someone with ADHD who falls asleep very rapidly, often from boredom. It can be life-threatening if experienced when driving.

What Causes Sleep Disturbances?

There are several theories as to what causes sleep disturbances, and thus fatigue, in people with ADHD.

Some experts believe that sleep disturbances are a manifestation of ADHD itself. This means that they believe that the sleep issues are a part of the disease process of ADHD.

Another theory is the circadian rhythm – or rather, a lack thereof. According to *ADDitude*, “the lack of an accurate circadian clock may also account for the difficulty that many with ADHD have in judging the passage of time. Their internal clocks are not ‘set.’ Consequently, they experience only two times: ‘now’ and ‘not now.’

How to Treat and Cope With ADHD Fatigue

When ADHD is untreated, many of the symptoms, including fatigue can get worse over time.

Some people with ADHD related fatigue find that simple daily tasks are difficult, they are very disorganized and find most activities to be exhausting. Luckily, in most cases, the use of both medication and behavior therapy can help reduce symptoms of fatigue and help patients learn how to manage their lives better.

Using Therapy and Medication to Help Symptoms

Treatment for ADHD is offered through a licensed psychiatrist, who will evaluate you and determine the type of medication you need.

According to experts, stimulant medications are over 80 percent effective in treating fatigue and the additional symptoms seen in patients with ADHD. Many patients claim that their fatigue is cleared up from the medication alone, but you may need to take extra steps to clear it up completely.

Making Simple Lifestyle Changes

Certain changes in your lifestyle may also need to be made to help reduce ADHD related fatigue. For one, staying up too late due to the inability to settle down can often lead to daytime fatigue.

A mental health expert can offer you with information on techniques you can use to settle down at night, along with information on how to change additional areas of your life that may have been impacted by your ADHD, like healthy eating habits.

Practicing Good Sleep Hygiene to Fight ADHD Fatigue Syndrome

Who hasn’t heard the term “sleep hygiene” these days? It seems like every physician is spouting this term, as is every health magazine and newspaper. It is the cure-all for sleep conditions. But what the heck does it even mean? And can it help someone with ADHD?

The National Sleep Foundation defines sleep hygiene as, “Sleep hygiene is a variety of different practices and habits that are necessary to have good nighttime sleep quality and full daytime alertness.”

So basically, adopting a set of habits *should* allow for better sleep and better daytime alertness – even for

someone with ADHD.

The key components of sleep hygiene include:

- Limiting naps – and if naps are taken, limiting them to no more than 30 minutes. A 30-minute nap can improve alertness.
- Avoid caffeine close to bedtime.
- Exercise – as little as 10 minutes per day can improve sleep quality. However, avoiding strenuous activity right before bed is recommended.
- Avoid disruptive foods right before bed, such as citrus fruits, carbonated drinks, and very heavy, fatty foods.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine, such as a bath and reading a book.
- Make a comfortable sleep environment. Have a comfortable bed, ensure a temperature of 65-70 degrees, keep the room quiet or use white noise, and remove cell phones, for example.