Dispelling Adult ADHD Myths

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ADHD: Truth and Fiction

Did you know that attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is associated with where you live? Recently, a study became public that found an association between elevation and risk of having an ADHD diagnosis.

It turns out that the higher you are from sea level, the lower the risk for ADHD symptoms, and the closer you are to sea level, higher rates of ADHD are found.

Does this sound like fact or fiction to you?

In this case, the study mentioned above sounds like a tall tale when, in actuality it is totally true. This is the problem with ADHD. It has become so widely known and discussed in the media and by parents that the reliable information is hard to separate from an old yarn.

This distinction is even harder to make when the truth is confusing and complicated, and the fiction is appealing.

This article's goal is to gather the most popular conceptions of ADHD and separate the myth from the reality. This way, you can be sure that the information you use in your daily life is built on a solid foundation of fact and not coincidences or anecdotal material passed to you by untrustworthy sources.

Myth vs Reality

Myth – ADHD Isn't Real, It Was Created by Pharmaceutical Companies to Sell Medication

Reality – Information about symptoms related to ADHD are well documented throughout time. Most notably, a German textbook published in 1775 discusses hyperactive, distractible children and adults who are unable to complete tasks.

The use of medication for ADHD symptoms was happened upon by a doctor in 1935. Like many events in mental health, this was more of a coincidence than a designed plan.

Myth – ADHD Is Diagnosed Far Too Much and Only Occurs in the U.S.

Reality – The reality of this may surprise you. The American Psychiatric Association reports that ADHD is present in 5% of children and 2.5% of adults in the US. They go on to report that these rates are consistent throughout other countries and cultures around the world. This helps illustrate the notion that ADHD is not only an "American problem."

In fact, some groups believe that the rate of ADHD is much higher than 5% in children, pointing to the idea that ADHD goes under diagnosed in some populations, including females and minorities.

Next page: additional myths and truths.

Myth vs Reality

Myth – People With ADHD Can Stop Their Symptoms If They Try Hard Enough

Reality – ADHD is a widely researched, documented and accepted mental health disorder. Expecting someone with ADHD to sit still and focus for extended periods is like asking someone in a wheelchair to climb a flight of steps. It is insensitive and impractical.

People with ADHD are often intelligent and have a good chance of being capable in the classroom or workplace, but most classrooms and workplaces are not designed for people with ADHD.

Studies show that children who are allowed to fidget with something, stand during class and have periods of activity learn better in the classroom. Rather than trying to change the students in the classroom, schools might do well to change the classrooms where the students are taught.

Myth – ADHD Is Caused by Eating Too Much Sugar and Watching Too Much TV.

Reality – This one is a bit tricky. There are several factors to consider, and the key word is “cause.” Simply stated, there is no proof to say that sugar or screen time causes ADHD. That said, there is evidence to point towards sugar and TV causing ADHD-like symptoms.

The impacts of sugar are common knowledge. When a child eats too much sugar they begin to display signs of increased activity levels and short attention spans, but these signs do not mean that they have ADHD.

Similarly, if someone drinks a lot of coffee and begins feeling shaky, flushed and more irritable, they do not meet criteria for an anxiety disorder. Sugar, like caffeine, is a drug. It creates changes when put into your body or the body of a child.

TV fits into the same principle. Some research shows that when children watch fast-paced cartoons with frequent scene changes they perform lower on tests that measure cognitive capability and impulse control. The results found were immediate, like sugar consumption, and it is reasonable to think that they would wear off after time has passed.

Also, there are links associating increased screen time to higher rates of ADHD. This is only a correlation, though, not cause and effect. A reasonable explanation is that kids with ADHD want to watch more TV.

Myth – My Child Is Calm and Quiet. He Can't Have ADHD.

Reality – ADHD presents differently for different people. When you imagine the stereotypical child with ADHD, you probably see a white male who is “bouncing off the walls” and struggling to pay attention in school.

But this isn’t always the case. Actually, ADHD is broken up into three separate groups. They are:

- **Combined presentation**, which means they have both hyperactivity and inattention symptoms
- **Predominately hyperactive presentation**, which means they have the impulsivity symptoms without poor attention
- **Predominately inattentive presentation**, which means that they have symptoms of poor concentration but not hyperactivity.

The last group really breaks the conception of what ADHD looks like and can be harder to recognize and diagnose.

Next page: more myths and truths about ADHD.

Myth vs Reality

Myth – Adults Cannot Have ADHD. Children Outgrow It by 18.

Reality – Sorry. Adults can and do have ADHD. Part of the criteria is that someone must have had symptoms of ADHD prior to age 12, but symptoms can last into adulthood and beyond.

Some people do see diminished symptoms of ADHD as an adult as the demands of life change and coping skills improve, but reports claim that up to 70% of children diagnosed with ADHD will have symptoms into adulthood.

Myth – ADHD Is Caused by Bad Parenting.

Reality – Again, people get into trouble when they assign a cause and effect relationship to things. It's true – inconsistent or permissive parenting styles can exacerbate ADHD symptoms, but they do not create ADHD. Likewise, a very consistent parenting style cannot magically cure ADHD.

Parents do have an important role in ADHD, though. Studies are showing genetic links associated with ADHD –ADHD may be a product of nature more so than nurture.

Myth – An ADHD Brain Is Too Active and Medication Helps Slow It Down.

Reality – People always talk about ADHD medication "calming" someone down. The truth is that many effective ADHD medications are stimulants. They actually speed up the body and increase alertness.

People with ADHD commonly have underactive brain management networks. Effective medications increase alertness and improve communication in the brain's management system.

Myth – My Friend's ADHD Medication Helped My Focus – I Must Have ADHD.

Reality – If you wanted to study all night for a test or really focus at work without falling asleep, caffeine might be your drug of choice. Think of stimulant medication for ADHD as being supercharged caffeine.

Most people who took a stimulant would report feeling more alert, focused and attentive, but this does not mean that you have ADHD. It only means that you are finding a similar benefit. Remember, taking a drug that is not prescribed to you can be dangerous and potentially deadly. People who abuse stimulant medication can have problems with their cardiovascular health.

If you think ADHD might be a problem for you, seek appropriate mental health treatment.

Myth – ADHD Is Caused by Pesticides, Lead, Smoking and Chemicals in Food.

Reality – This is really more of the same. People search for links between substances and ADHD. There are relationships between pesticides, lead, smoking while pregnant, drinking while pregnant, other chemicals and ADHD symptoms.

To this point, there has been no definitive proof stating that any of these "cause" ADHD. If you find that certain substances make symptoms worse for you or your child, it would be foolish to continue exposure, but keep in mind that others have very different experiences.

Conclusion

With something like ADHD, it can be hard to know what is fact and what is fiction. Do your best to trust what you

see and what you learn from reputable sources. Along the way, work to lessen your belief in urban legend and internet rumors.

The right information brings you closer to improving your ADHD or the symptoms of others. Know the facts to know ADHD.