How to Cope With ADHD and Clumsiness

by KRISTI LAZZARI

Is There a Link Between ADHD and Clumsiness?

I never thought about the relationship between clumsiness and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) until fairly recently. I've always been clumsy — tripping, running into doorways, dropping everything. I just never stopped long enough to put the two together.

Then my daughter came along. She turned tripping and running into things into an art form. I honestly believe she has had teachers who think she does excessively clumsy things on purpose. The child once tripped in church and flipped over a pew — she sailed right over the back of it and landed in the pew in front of her. A couple of days later she flipped over a picnic table. Yes, a picnic table. She can slip and fall getting into the car, she has fallen in rivers and puddles. She can hit her head with a door while she is opening it. Recently, she rolled her own forehead up in the car window.

The Casualties of Clumsiness

Between the two of us and how many pairs of glasses we break, I have considered switching to all plastic dishes. My phone and iPod are both battered and broken from all the sudden trips to the floor. My eyeglasses sit at a permanently skewed angle from slamming my face into walls and doorjambs.

My daughter is always full of scrapes and cuts. She is never completely bruise-free at any time. She also has no idea where most of the bruises come from.

My child's clumsiness often affects those around her, as she elbows them, falls on them, or hits them with a flying appendage. She will feel bad and pet you after she hurts you, but bystanders do need to beware. It isn't pretty.

You Aren't Alone

Recently I ran across some posts in an ADHD discussion forum where people were talking about some of the clumsy things they do. There were questions about whether the clumsiness was related to ADHD, with lots of different opinions.

The questions definitely got me thinking. Although there were no definitive answers there — just questions and people sharing their personal experiences — the link seemed pretty solid to me.

How is Clumsiness Related to ADHD?

It makes sense that the two can be related. One reason we may run into doorways or trip over furniture is that, in our minds, we are already picturing the task we are going to do, not the path we are walking on to get there. Our minds have moved on to the final destination.

It could also be a lack of attention altogether. We are simply thinking of other things, and not being mindful of our bodies.

As a cognitive processing disorder with executive function impairment, it makes sense that those with ADHD may have difficulties with motor skills. As children, we are often slower at learning fine motor skills, such as tying shoelaces, and our hand-eye coordination is often impaired.

What Can You Do About It?

If you have ADHD and clumsiness is an issue for you, what can you do? Besides just learning to accept it, there may be some things that help.

- **Medication.** I don't take ADHD medication, but some people I have talked to believe that when they take their medication it calms down the clumsiness. My daughter seems to be more in control of her body when she takes her medication.
- **Keep clutter down.** Keep clutter off of stairs and out of walkways to avoid mishaps.
- **Keep areas lit.** Keep nightlights in hallways or bathrooms on at night so you will be less likely to run into things in the dark.
- **Make things as secure as possible.** Tape down edges of rugs with double-sided tape to reduce chance of slipping. Secure things like bookcases to a wall whenever possible. Make furniture and surroundings as stable as possible.
- **Take care of yourself.** Lack of sleep, skipping meals or stressful situations can all affect dexterity. Eating right, getting enough rest and exercising can improve motor coordination.
- **Practice hand-eye coordination.** There are exercises you can do to improve hand-eye coordination. Also, exercises for balance, such as aerobics or yoga, may help.
- **Mindfulness.** Perhaps the greatest way to improve coordination and reduce clumsiness is to practice mindfulness. Be aware of your surroundings and the movements of your body. Practice doing things with care. Being aware of your movements can greatly reduce the mishaps associated with being clumsy.

I doubt I will ever cure my clumsy nature. It's a part of me as much as ADHD is. I've come to accept that it is just who I am. I am never going to be exceedingly graceful. Okay, I am never going to be even a little bit graceful. I laugh about it as much as possible, and my daughter has learned to have a sense of humor about her own clumsiness as well. It's certainly nothing to be ashamed of; it's just another symptom of the chaos that can be ADHD. Personally, I think it just makes us highly entertaining at parties.