



## THE FEEL OF ADD

[A mélange of contradictory tendencies]

### Delivered from Distraction

(excerpts from Chapter 2)

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**Most people who don't have ADD<sup>1</sup> don't understand it. [It is important to understand] it's complexity: ADD is a mélange<sup>2</sup> of often contradictory tendencies and traits that swirl around within you, stirring up different parts of your life at different times as it makes its inconsistent rounds.**

#### **The ingredients of the mélange may include:**

- high mental and physical energy (coupled with extreme lassitude at times)
- a fast-moving, easily distracted mind (coupled with an amazingly super-focused mind at times)
- trouble with remembering, planning and anticipating
- unpredictability and impulsivity
- creativity
- lack of inhibition as compared to others
- disorganization (coupled with remarkable organizational skills in certain domains)
- a tendency toward procrastination (coupled with an I-must-do-it-or-have-it-now attitude at times)
- a high intensity attitude alternating with a foggy one
- forgetfulness (coupled with an extraordinary recall of certain often irrelevant remote information)
- passionate interests (coupled with an inability to arouse interest at other times)
- an original, often zany way of looking at the world
- irritability (coupled with tenderheartedness)
- a tendency to drink too much alcohol, smoke cigarettes, use other drugs, or get involved with addictive activities such as gambling, shopping, spending, sex, food, and the Internet (coupled with a tendency to abstain altogether at times)
- a tendency to worry unnecessarily (coupled with a tendency not to worry enough when worry is warranted)
- a tendency to be a nonconformist or a maverick
- a tendency to reject help from others (coupled with a tendency to want to give help to others)
- generosity that can go too far
- a tendency to repeat the same mistake many times without learning from it
- a tendency to underestimate the time it takes to complete a task or get to a destination
- various other ingredients, none of which dominates all the time, and any one of which may be absent in a single individual

No two people who have ADD are alike. Variety and inconsistency make it impossible to capture a definitive picture of this fast-moving mind-butterfly.

ADD is a way of [being] that has been with us throughout history. Until recently it went unnamed, even to those who had it. **Before the syndrome is diagnosed, life may be filled with pain and misunderstanding. But after the diagnosis is made, one often finds new possibilities and a lever for major improvements in life.**

Having ADD is like trying to build a house of cards in a windstorm. You must build a structure to protect yourself from the wind before you can even start building with the cards. You put up a lean-to, and feel proud of what you've done, only to see a gust of wind tear it down. So you start again, and once again the wind wins. So you construct the lean-to again. And again. You never get to the cards. But you don't give up. That is another trait of people with ADD. They keep trying. Often they keep trying the same doomed way, but they do keep trying.

<sup>1</sup> **ADD or ADHD?** Although the term has officially been changed to ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder], many people do not experience hyperactive qualities. The next revision of the Physician's Diagnostic Manual is likely to restore the original ADD term with subcategories for Inattentive, Hyperactive and Mixed characteristics.

<sup>2</sup> **Mélange:** A complex mixture or confusion.

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In other ways having ADD is like being supercharged all the time – like having a race-car brain. Your brain goes faster than the average brain. Your trouble is putting on the brakes. You get one idea and you have to act on it, and then, what do you know, but you've got another idea before you've finished up with the first one, and so you go for that one, but of course a third idea intercepts the second, and you just have to follow that one, and pretty soon people are calling you disorganized and impulsive and disobedient and defiant and all sorts of impolite words that miss the point completely. You're trying so hard to get it right. It's just that you have all these invisible vectors pulling you this way and that, which makes it really hard to stay on task.

Someone once said, “Time is the thing that keeps everything from happening all at once.” Time parcels out moments into separate bits so that we can do one thing at a time. In ADD, time collapses, making life feel as if everything is happening at once. It's now or never...or maybe later. This creates panic. One loses perspective and the ability to select what needs to be done first, what needs to be done second, and what can wait until another day. Instead, you are always on the go, leaping before you look, always trying to keep the world from caving in on top of you.

It is not surprising that depression, toxic worry, and anxiety disorders abound among people with undiagnosed ADD. We never know when we're going to forget something, say the wrong thing, or show up at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Many people with ADD crave high-stimulus situations. Obviously, this can get a person into trouble, which is why ADD is prevalent among criminals and self-destructive risk-takers. ADD is also often found among so called 'A-type' personalities, as well as among manic-depressives, sociopaths, violent people, drug abusers and alcoholics. But it is also common among creative and intuitive people in all fields, and among highly energetic, interesting, productive people.

Usually the positive side of ADD doesn't get mentioned – the tendency is to focus on what goes wrong or needs to be controlled. But once the ADD has been diagnosed, and the child or adult has learned how to take care of whatever was wrong, the brain offers up an untapped realm. Now you can start to use all the great plans and ideas you've been storing up for years. You start doing things you've never been able to do before – surprising everyone around you and surprising yourself. People with ADD often have a special “feel” for life, a way of seeing right into the heart of matters, while others have to reason their way along methodically. The person who at first seemed impaired may soon prove gifted.