

Keywords used: ADHD in adults

Problem: ADHD often conjures images of kids jumping around a room. This condition is most prevalent in children. However, it can persist through adulthood, triggering harmful behaviors. Adult ADHD often goes unrecognized and untreated.

Solution: Primary care providers must be aware of common symptoms of adult ADHD. With judgment-free conversations, adult patients can receive the care, diagnosis and intervention they need to succeed personally and professionally.

Tips for Talking about ADHD with Adult Patients

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) often conjures images of kids jumping around a room. This condition is most prevalent in children. However, it can persist through adulthood, triggering harmful behaviors.

According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), more than 100 million adults live with persistent ADHD. Additionally, more than 300 million experience symptomatic adult ADHD. The general presumption is that adult and childhood ADHD affect the same group of people. However, studies indicate that more than two-thirds of symptomatic adults never experienced ADHD during childhood.

Adult ADHD can significantly impact your patient's personal and professional life. Primary care providers are vital advocates and patient educators. By addressing concerns, clinicians can help individuals get the support they need.

Key Takeaways

- Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) affects children and adults. Regardless of age, this condition can trigger harmful behaviors and adverse outcomes.
- ADHD in adults often goes unreported, undiagnosed and untreated. These individuals daily battle inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.
- The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) provides diagnostic guidance for providers.
- With judgment-free conversations and evidence-based interventions, clinicians can help patients succeed personally and professionally.
- According to the National Institute of Health, more than 400 million adults live with either persistent or symptomatic ADHD.

The impact of ADHD in adults

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental syndrome that affects attention, impulsivity and activity levels. The **impact of ADHD in adults is significant, contributing to several unpleasant outcomes:**

- Underachievement
- Unemployment
- Divorce
- Compulsive buying
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Illicit drug use
- Criminal behaviors

The belief that ADHD affects only children often prevents adults from receiving help. More than two-thirds of adults living with this condition never experienced childhood ADHD. Yet, diagnostic protocols require a childhood-onset confirmation for a persistent ADHD diagnosis.

ADHD drastically impacts individuals' lives and correlates with several psychiatric disorders:

- Affective disorders
- Defiant disorders
- Antisocial personality disorders
- Self-harm
- Substance misuse

Adult ADHD often goes unrecognized and untreated. That's why primary care providers must be aware of common indicators for ADHD in adults. With judgment-free conversations, patients can receive the care, diagnosis and intervention they need to succeed personally and professionally.

Three steps to talking about adult ADHD

The symptoms can be frustrating, but patients often dismiss them. They have lived with the condition for so long that they assume the challenges are typical. For many, shame and feelings of failure follow them. These **emotions and symptoms affect their work life, relationships and self-care.**

Patients may have never considered ADHD as the cause of their challenges. By explaining symptoms and offering help, clinicians provide valuable resources to promote confidence and success.

Explain the signs of adult ADHD

People with this condition can struggle with feelings of inadequacy. They frequently demonstrate self-sabotaging thoughts and behaviors. Having a medical professional explain the signs provides hope.

Adults with ADHD can experience inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity. Some individuals encounter more significant challenges with inattention, while others struggle with hyperactivity or impulsivity.

Indicators of inattention may include difficulty with:

- Absorbing details which often leads to careless mistakes
- Listening even in direct conversations
- Following instructions or finishing tasks
- Organizing activities
- Managing time
- Losing items like their phone, keys or purse
- Becoming easily distracted
- Forgetting basic things

Indicators of impulsivity or hyperactivity may include:

- Extreme restlessness
- Fidgeting or squirming
- Excessive talking
- Impatience or difficulty waiting in line
- Habit of interrupting others
- Inability to participate in quiet, leisure activities

Though receiving an ADHD diagnosis can feel like a mixed bag, understanding the condition helps improve self-empathy. So, how can physicians confidently diagnose ADHD in adults?

Diagnose ADHD in adults

Physicians can diagnose individuals 17 or older with adult ADHD. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), is the go-to resource for diagnosing ADHD. Clinicians can confidently and appropriately diagnose and treat this condition using cohesive standards.

The DSM-5 criteria require the following factors for an adult ADHD diagnosis:

Inattention: Five or more indicators of inattention persisting for at least six months

Hyperactivity-impulsivity: Five or more indicators of hyperactivity-impulsivity persisting for at least six months

In addition to these indicators, the following characteristics must also be present:

1. Symptoms are present in at least two settings
2. Symptoms are disruptive and inappropriate for developmental level
3. Several symptoms were present before age 12
4. Other conditions do not better explain the symptoms

The NIH defines persistent adult ADHD as a condition that presents with the appropriate number of indicators and confirmation of childhood onset. Conversely, *symptomatic adult ADHD* meets all DSM-5 criteria for an ADHD diagnosis. However, it presents *without confirmation of symptoms being present before age 12*.

People often joke about forgetfulness and an inability to focus on details. They jest, "Maybe I have some type of attention-deficit disorder." However, for individuals experiencing adult ADHD, these symptoms are no joking matter. They negatively impact many aspects of life. These individuals need someone willing to advocate and help.

Offer treatment options

Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical treatment options are available for adults experiencing ADHD. Discussing personal preferences is vital to creating an individualized treatment plan. Patients may prefer trying cognitive behavioral therapy before committing to a medication regimen.

Stimulants are highly effective medicinal treatments for ADHD. However, they have potential side effects and require a clinician's oversight. Cognitive behavioral therapy may not prove as effective as medication. But it can help patients cope with daily challenges. Therapy is particularly beneficial when the condition co-exists with other mental health illnesses.

Delivering personalized behavioral health services

Behavioral health conditions, like ADHD, often negatively impact your patient's life. With judgment-free conversations, adult patients can receive the care, diagnosis and intervention they need to succeed personally and professionally.

<Facility Name> **is committed to excellence and empathy.** We provide individualized behavioral health services within your community. Our staff is eager to partner with you to deliver outstanding behavioral health services to your patients. Click the "Refer" button to get started.

Resources

“Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Adults: What You Need to Know.” NIH: National Institute of Mental Health, 2021, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Adults: What You Need to Know - National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

“The prevalence of adult attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A global systematic review and meta-analysis. NIH: National Library of Medicine, 2021, The prevalence of adult attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A global systematic review and meta-analysis - PMC.

“Compulsive Buying: Earlier Illicit Drug Use, Impulse Buying, Depression, and Adult ADHD Symptoms.” NIH: National Library of Medicine, 2015, Compulsive Buying: Earlier Illicit Drug Use, Impulse Buying, Depression, and Adult ADHD Symptoms - PMC.