

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Affects Memory in Adults”

Usually we associate memory problems with Alzheimer’s disease. An estimated 5.5 million people have Alzheimer’s disease (AD) and Alzheimer’s will claim 14 million victims by 2050. Alzheimer’s is a progressive disease that gradually destroys brain tissue and people’s ability to remember, think, communicate, and lead independent lives. It is the most common form of dementia. However, some older adults with attention and memory problems can have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Some may be surprised to learn that ADHD causes impaired memory symptoms. Researchers have shown that symptoms of ADHD can carry over into adulthood for two-thirds of patients who had ADHD as children. ADHD is also one of the most heritable health disorders, meaning that someone with ADHD may have a parent, grandparent, or sibling with the disorder. According to the National Institutes of Mental Health, the overall prevalence of ADHD in US adults aged 18-44 years is 4.4%, with a higher prevalence among men (5.4%) than women (3.2%). Researchers suggested that the prevalence of ADHD symptoms declines to 1.0% to 2.8% in the most elderly. The differential diagnosis for older-age ADHD is long and includes mild cognitive impairment, dementia, other neurodegenerative disorders, polypharmacy, sleep disturbances, chronic pain, and difficulties with vision/hearing. ADHD could, therefore, be mistaken for one of these other conditions. And a growing number of patients aged ≥ 50 years are assessed and treated for ADHD worldwide. Young people with ADHD often present with inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. Because ADHD symptoms can extend into adulthood for a lot of patients, the topic has taken on increased gravitas in recent times. We do know that adults with ADHD have high rates of depression, anxiety, substance misuse, and dependency, as well as personality disorders and issues with self-esteem. Hyperactivity usually abates in adulthood, but heightened motor activity, fidgeting, impatience, risk taking, and sensation seeking are common—all of which can cause substantial impairment. Adults with persistent (adult) ADHD may be prone to inattention, poor concentration, forgetfulness, distractibility, disorganization, lack of conscientiousness, irritability, emotional lability, and most importantly, problems with working memory. Just as with AD, there is no cure for ADHD. Making use of organizational tools—like calendars, alarms, sticky notes, and daily planners—could also help in managing memory issues and other symptoms of ADHD. Stimulants like methylphenidate or dextroamphetamine have been shown to be effective in treating ADHD in adults, including the elderly.

In the America that I love, researchers are desperately searching for ways to prevent or cure AD and ADHD. Exercise and increased intake of oxygen appears to help with both. Please check out my books (www.amazon.com), *"Alzheimer's Disease: Forget Antioxidants and Supplements,"* and *"Exercise and Reactive Oxygen Species: Likely the only health miracle out there."*

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