Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurological disorder that begins in childhood and often continues into adulthood. ADHD is believed to affect approximately 6-7% of school-aged children and continues through adulthood in approximately 30-50% of these individuals. Males are more often diagnosed with the disorder than females. Symptoms include inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsivity. Individuals with ADHD can express one or more of these symptoms to varying degrees. Adults usually experience more problems with inattentiveness and fewer problems with hyperactivity than children. Symptoms can also vary during an individual's lifetime. Comorbidities, such as a learning disability, anxiety and depression or a substance abuse problem, are common in individuals diagnosed with ADHD.

College can be a difficult time for people with ADHD because of the sudden increase in independence and responsibility. For instance, college students must attend lecture and pay attention, plan study time and make appointments largely without the help of parents and teachers. Comorbidities associated with ADHD may lead to social and relationship problems, as well as academic difficulties. For these reasons, it is essential for college students to maintain their treatment and be well informed about their disorder.

ADHD Subtypes
The 3 ADHD subtypes are predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive-impulsive, and a combination of inattentiveness and hyperactivity-impulsivity.

- The predominantly inattentive subtype is characterized by an inability to remain focused on a task and concentrate. Individuals with this subtype are easily distracted, make careless errors, are disorganized, have difficulty following instructions, lose things, and can be easily confused.
- The predominantly hyperactive-impulsive subtype is characterized by excessive movement and impulsive behavior. Hyperactive symptoms may not be present in adults or may present as restlessness in adults.
- Individuals with the combined subtype have symptoms of both the inattentive subtype and hyperactive-impulsive subtype.

Comorbidities
Comorbidity is the presence of another disorder in addition to the primary disorder of ADHD. Common comorbid conditions include substance abuse, learning disorders, sleep disorders, depression, anxiety, conduct disorder, and employment and social problems. Individuals with ADHD are more likely than the general population to experience these problems.

The Cause of ADHD
Many factors likely contribute to ADHD, including genetic and environmental factors, however, the cause of ADHD is still largely unknown. It is believed the frontal cortex is involved. Promising research is ongoing which will hopefully elucidate the cause in the future.

Treatment
No cure exists for ADHD but there are different treatments that can help manage the symptoms of ADHD. Treatments include medication, coaching, education and psychotherapy.

Stimulant medications, such as Methylphenidate (Ritalin) and Amphetamines (Adderall) are most commonly used to treat ADHD. Although they are stimulants, they have a calming effect on individuals with ADHD. Common side effects include trouble sleeping, decreased appetite and tics. Less common side effects include cardiovascular or psychiatric problems. A non-stimulant medication, Atomoxetine (Strattera), has been approved by the FDA. Studies have shown that suicide ideation, while still very rare, is more common in children taking Atomoxetine.

Psychotherapy may primarily be used to treat comorbid problems associated with ADHD, such as low self-esteem, anxiety and depression. Students at the University of Richmond can visit the Counseling and Psychological Services and make an appointment to meet with a psychologist.

Coaching can be provided by any number of people. Coaching helps those with ADHD learn strategies to deal with their symptoms. In particular, coaching can help students find strategies to become more organized, better manage their time, set goals, monitor achievements and create schedules. University of Richmond students may find the advisors, mentors and tutors at the Academic Skills Center to be particularly helpful. Appointments can be made by visiting the Academic Skills Center website, asc.richmond.edu.

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