

SPRING 2012

# FOCUS

## VISTA PSYCHOLOGICAL & COUNSELING CENTRE

### Myths About ADD/ADHD



Just-released government statistics confirm that ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) is more prevalent than ever before, increasing over the past decade from 6.9% among children ages 5 to 17. With nearly 1 in 10 kids being diagnosed with ADHD, and more adults learning they have it, too, it's become commonplace to blame it for everything from bad behavior to a messy house. Everyone from friends and neighbors to Hollywood celebrities, has something to say about it, much of it with no basis in science. Here to help you get your facts straight, the top 10 misconceptions about ADHD:

**Myth #1:** Only kids have ADHD.

Although about 10% of kids 5 to 17 years old have been diagnosed with ADHD, at least 4% of adults have it too—probably many more, since adult ADHD is often undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. That's partly because people think only kids get it.

**Myth #2:** All kids "outgrow" ADHD.

Up to 70% of children with ADHD continue to have trouble with it in adulthood, which can create relationship problems, money troubles, work strife, and a rocky family life.

**Myth #3:** Medication is the only treatment for ADHD.

Medication can be useful in managing ADHD symptoms, but it's not a cure. And it's not the only treatment. Lifestyle changes, counseling, and behavior modification can significantly improve symptoms as well. Several studies suggest that a combination of ADHD treatments works best.

**Myth #4:** People who have ADHD are lazy

and lack intelligence and willpower.

This is totally not true. In fact, ADHD has nothing to do with intelligence or determination. It's a neurobehavioral disorder caused by changes in brain chemicals and the way the brain works. It presents unique challenges, but they can be overcome—which many successful people have done. Even Albert Einstein is said to have had symptoms of ADHD.

**Myth #5:** ADHD isn't a real disorder.

Not so. Doctors and mental-health professionals agree that ADHD is a biological disorder that can significantly impair functioning. An imbalance in brain chemicals affects brain areas that regulate behavior and emotion. This is what produces ADHD symptoms.

**Myth #6:** Bad parenting causes ADHD.

Absolutely not! ADHD symptoms are caused by brain-chemical im-

balances (see #4 and #5) that make it hard to pay attention and control impulses. Good parenting skills help children deal with their symptoms.

**Myth #7:** Kids with ADHD are always hyper.

Not always. ADHD comes in three "flavors": predominantly inattentive; predominantly hyperactive; and combined, which is a mix of inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive symptoms. Although kids with hyperactive-impulsive or combined ADHD may be fidgety and restless, kids with inattentive ADHD are not hyper.

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## Myths About ADHD

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**Myth #8:** Too much TV causes ADHD.

Not really. But spending excessive amounts of time watching TV or playing video games could trigger the condition in susceptible individuals. And in kids and teens who already have ADHD, spending hours staring at electronic screen may make the symptoms worse.

**Myth #9:** If you can focus on certain things, you don't have ADHD.

It's not that simple. Al-

though it's true that people with ADHD have trouble focusing on things that don't interest them, there's a flip side to the disorder. Some people with ADHD get overly absorbed in activities they enjoy. This symptom is called *hyperfocus*. It can help you be more productive in activities that you like, but you can become so focused that you ignore responsibilities you don't like.

**Myth #10:** ADHD is over diagnosed.

Nope. If anything, ADHD is under diagnosed and

under treated. Many children with ADHD grow up to be adults with ADHD. The pressures and responsibilities of adulthood often exacerbate ADHD symptoms, leading adults to seek evaluation and help for the first time. Also, parents who have children with ADHD may seek treatment only after recognizing similar symptoms in themselves.

By the Editors of RealAge Parenting-Fri., Aug. 19, 2011 as viewed on Shine from Yahoo.

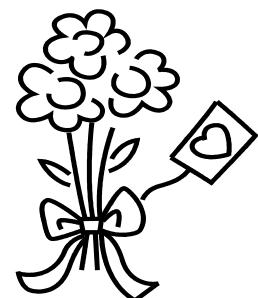
**"Some people with ADHD can get overly absorbed in activities they enjoy....called hyperfocus."**

## Ways To Cultivate Gratitude

Gratitude is a way for people to appreciate what they have instead of always reaching for something new in the hopes it will make them happier, or thinking they can't feel satisfied until every physical and material need is met. Gratitude helps people refocus on what they have instead of what they lack. And, although it may feel contrived at first, this mental state grows stronger with use and practice. Here are some ways to cultivate gratitude on a regular basis. **Write a thank you note.** You can make yourself hap-

pier and nurture your relationships by writing thank-you notes to the people that impact your life. Send it, or better yet, deliver and read it in person if possible. Make a habit of sending at least one gratitude letter a month. Once in a while, send one to yourself. **Thank someone mentally.** No time to write? It may help just to think about someone who has done something nice for you, and mentally thank the individual. **Keep a gratitude journal.** Make it a habit to write down or share with a loved one thoughts about the gifts

you've received each day. **Count your blessings.** Pick a time every week to sit down and write about your blessings—reflecting on what went right or what you are grateful for. Sometimes it helps to pick a number—such as three to five things—that you will identify each week. As you write, be specific and think about the sensations you felt when something good happened to you. **Pray.** People who are religious can use prayer to cultivate gratitude. **Meditate.** Mindfulness meditation involves focusing on the present moment



without judgement. Although people often focus on a word or phrase (such as "calm" or "peace"), it is also possible to focus on what you're grateful for (the warmth of the sun, a pleasant sound, etc.)

**Source:**  
Taken in part from [www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter/Harvard\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Letter/2011/November/in-praise-of-gratitude](http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter/Harvard_Mental_Health_Letter/2011/November/in-praise-of-gratitude)

## Ending An Eating Disorder

Eating disorders have their root in mental associations with physical actions. When an individual associates eating or refusing to eat with a feeling of being in control, pleasure, or confidence, they use it as a substitute for their lack of control over their feelings in the real world. The key to breaking the disorder lies in changing the meaning that has been attached to food, thereby breaking the endless cycle. In fact, nearly all successes attributed to psychotherapy depend on how quickly people can change the meaning they attach to different things in life. This “rewiring” of the brain is a process known as neuroplasticity and, according to Dr. Irina Webster, founder of The Eating Disorder Institute, it can

be influential in the recovery from an eating disorder. Here's how it works:

**Get leverage.** This means you have to get to the point where you believe you must change, and you must change now. You must believe that *not* to change will be more painful and that change will bring you pleasure. Only a definite “must change” belief will give you leverage.

**Interrupt the pattern.** This is when you do something totally unexpected in relation to your dominating thoughts. For example, when a bulimic person gets stressed by the end of the day or feels uncomfortable regarding something—their first thought is to binge eat and purge to get pleasure, control and inner

confidence. For an anorexic—the thoughts of success and looking good and being confident associated with refusing to eat and restricting one’s intake is their way of dealing with things. This thought association needs to be interrupted with some unexpected stimulus which distracts the person into paying more attention to what is going on right here and now in their mind. Over time, these repeated interruptions will help to break old unhealthy thought associations.

Dr. Irina Webster, MD founder of The Eating Disorder Institute, Canberra, Australia. She is the author of Cure your Eating Disorder: 5 Step Program to Change Your Brain – The Neuroplasticity Approach.



**The key to breaking the disorder lies in changing the meaning that has been attached to food...**

## Saying “I Love You”

There are few phrases more loaded than “I love you.” New research published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology examines who says it first—and how it is received. The vast majority of study subjects believed that women normally say “I love you” first, near the two-month mark. Surprise! In more than 62% of relationships, the man said it first. On the average, men were happier if

they received confessions of love before a relationship turned sexual, while women were happier if first declarations of love came after sexual intimacy. It seems that, consciously or not, guys take a pre-sex “I love you” to mean “I’m ready to sleep with you,” while women worry it’s a move to get them into bed. Men in the study started thinking about professing their love about three months into

the relationship, while women started thinking about it at the five-month mark. From an evolutionary standpoint, women have more to lose from committing to a potential mate too soon, so they hold back instead of “getting serious.” Male study subjects who, unlike most of their cohorts were interested in long-term relationships (versus casual sex) preferred

to hear “I love you” after sex—when it wasn’t a rash declaration. “The message isn’t to discount everything men say about love,” says MIT researcher Joshua Ackerman. “You need to know more about the guy.”

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## Bend Away The Pain

Fibromyalgia is as elusive as diseases come. Characterized by constant body-wide pain with no identifiable cause, its existence is still held in contention by doctors. But for the 12 million mostly female Americans to whom the pain is very real, yoga therapy may bring relief. Two months of twice-weekly yoga sessions reduced pain in women with fibromyalgia, new research from New York University in Toronto reveals. Participants reported less pain and helplessness at the end of the study, as well as a boost in cortisol levels. In healthy individuals, cortisol levels fluctuate regularly, but in fibromyal-

gia patients, symptoms are associated with consistently low levels—reflecting dysregulation of the body's stress-management center. Without a regulated amount of cortisol, the body cannot adequately respond to or recover from stress. "For fibromyalgia sufferers, it's actually positive when the body begins producing more cortisol," says researcher Kathryn Curtis who led the study as a PhD student

in York's Department of Psychology, Faculty of Health in 2011. Patients also came away from the intervention with greater mindfulness, likely a result of Hatha yoga's emphasis on breathing, meditation, and inner reflection. Mindfulness, Curtis notes, may prevent patients from focusing on their own pain, and in doing so, keep them from amplifying it.



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