Making the Grade with ADHD: How to Succeed in College with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

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DSM-IV-TR Criteria for ADHD

- Inattentive type
  - Meets at least 6/9 criteria
- Hyperactive/Impulsive type
  - Meets at least 6/9 criteria
- Combined type
  - Meets criteria for both the Inattentive type and Hyperactive/Impulsive type
- Criteria may be changing in DSM-5 (2013)
How Many College Students May Have ADHD?

- Affects 4.4 % of adults in the United States\(^1\)
  - 8 million people
- Approximately 2 to 8% of the college population has ADHD\(^2\)
  - One study found 7.48%, with 20% approaching ADHD diagnostic requirements\(^3\)
- At least 25% of college students with disabilities are diagnosed with ADHD\(^2\)
How do College Students with ADHD Function Compared to Non-ADHD Classmates?

- More academic concerns and more depression than non-ADHD students\(^4,5\)
- Students with ADHD also have lower GPAs more social concerns, emotional instability, and substance use.\(^5\)
- Freshmen with ADHD were more likely to start smoking than their non-ADHD classmates.\(^5\)
Why ADHD Symptoms May Not “Show Up” Until College

- Many students are first diagnosed when they reach college
- The structure of high school may mitigate ADHD symptoms
- Students have difficulties with self-imposed structure in college
- Parents provided structure to the student when they lived at home
How Symptoms Change into Adulthood

- At least 50% of children with ADHD retain their symptoms into adulthood\(^6\)
- Hyperactivity turns into “inner restlessness”
- Inattention stays at same level, but hyperactivity looks less “hyperactive”
- Start having increased difficulties with money management
- May begin experiencing legal difficulties
What an ADHD Student Looks Like

- Does not work to potential
  - Has 160 IQ but gets C and D grades
- Consistently late to appointments
- Impulsive spending
- Difficulties with organization
  - Papers fall out of the backpack
- May have difficulty getting along with roommates or other peers
What an ADHD College Student Sounds Like

- “I sit and read, but I get to the end of the page and have no idea what I just read.”
- “My friends can sit in the library for 3 hours and study. I just wander around the rows of books until they’re ready to leave.”
- “My mom used to wake me up every morning for school. Now I forget to set my alarm clock and I miss my class.”
ADHD Students and their Parents

- The ADHD student may feel resentful of what they view as their parents’ interference and simultaneously feel dependent on their parents.

- Many parents have previously had to watch their ADHD children like a hawk.
  - Dilemma of backing off/getting involved.

- People with ADHD may go through developmental stages at a delayed rate.
ADHD Students Over the Traditional Age

- People with ADHD are less likely to attend college than their peers⁷
- Higher college dropout rate
- Return to school later in life
- May take longer to finish coursework
- May be working more than one job while attending school
ADHD College Students are at Increased Risk For:

- Car accidents
- Unplanned pregnancy
  - ADHD teens 10 times more likely to have an unplanned pregnancy than their peers
- Sexually transmitted diseases
  - 16% vs. 4% for non-ADHD adults
- Depression/anxiety
  - Comorbidity rate of 25%-50%
- Eating Disorders
  - 4 times more likely in ADHD girls
Drug and Alcohol Abuse Risks

- 1 in 5 ADHD adults has experienced substance abuse\(^1^2\)
- Start using drugs at an earlier age and have more intense use\(^1^3\)
- People with ADHD are more likely to succumb to peer pressure
- 8% of college students have used stimulant medication illicitly\(^1^4\)
- However, people who have ADHD & do not take medication are four times more likely to abuse substances\(^1^5,^1^6\)
Medications and ADHD

- **Stimulant medications**
  - Adderall, Vyvanse, Concerta, Daytrana
  - Schedule II drugs

- **Non-stimulant medications**
  - Strattera
  - Intuniv
Medication Issues

- If students must take their medication while on campus, the medication should be kept in the original pill bottle.
- Carry letter from doctor stating name and dosage of medication, and diagnosis of ADHD
- Medications should be secured at the student’s residence
Should a Student Change Doctors?

- Students should consider switching to a doctor in their new town if:
  - It is recommended by their hometown doctor
  - Student has comorbidity issues
  - Student has started a new medication or dosage
  - Student is planning on staying in area after they graduate
  - There is an ADHD specialist in the area
ADHD Medications and Athletes

- According to NCAA, ADHD medications are acceptable
- Yearly NCAA drug testing does not check for stimulants
- Stimulants are checked at drug testing for NCAA championships
  - Student must have letter from doctor submitted to team physician or coach ahead of time
Recommendations for Scholarly Success

- Seek accommodations
- Always attend the “real” class
  - Use the online/televised class as a supplement
- Use study groups
  - Limit the number of participants to four or five
- Meet with professors regularly
  - Review tests and class notes
- Get tutoring on a regular basis
Recommendations for Personal Success

- Seek help from a counselor and/or coach
- Receive regular health care
- Get as much sleep as possible
- Have a structured schedule
  - Study for 30 minutes, take a 15 minute break
  - Schedule in relaxation time, but not too much!
- Seek healthy stress-reducing outlets
Seeking Accommodations

- Accommodations “even the playing field” so the ADHD student is working at par with his or her peers.
- Receiving accommodations in high school do not automatically qualify a student for accommodations in college.
- Private colleges are not required to provide accommodations unless they receive federal funding.
Applying for Accommodations

- Apply through college’s Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS)
- Apply as early as possible
- Most OSDS require
  - Recent ADHD evaluation
    - College may require specific assessment tests
    - Student is responsible for paying for evaluation
  - Copy of IEP/Section 504 paperwork from high school
  - List of the student’s requested accommodations
Recommended Accommodations

- Assistance with writing class notes
- Extended time on tests
- Testing in a separate and quiet location
- Permission to record lectures
- Instructions given in writing
- Priority in class registration
- Reduced course load
Students’ Records & Privacy Rights

- Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA)
  - College students 17 years old and older have exclusive access to their records
  - Must sign a release to allow parental access to records

- It is recommended that students allow parents to have access to their records
Money Tips for ADHD College Students

- Have student’s account linked online to parents’ account
  - Easy transfer of funds
- Have a “reverse” credit card
  - Prepaid amount
- Get direct deposit & automatic withdrawal
- Use a bank with local branches
Living with Roommates

- Student should be honest about lack of neatness, but does not need to disclose ADHD diagnosis
- Student should not discuss their ADHD medication with roommates
- Pros vs. cons of roommate matching
- Pros vs. cons of living on own
Summary

Options available for college students with ADHD

- Medication
- Counseling
- Coaching
- Tutoring
- Accommodations
Recommended Resources

- Making the Grade with ADD: A Student’s Guide to Succeeding in College with Attention Deficit Disorder by Stephanie Sarkis PhD
- 10 Simple Solutions to Adult ADD: How to Overcome Chronic Distraction & Accomplish Your Goals (2nd ed.) by Stephanie Sarkis PhD
- Adult ADD: A Guide for the Newly Diagnosed by Stephanie Sarkis PhD
- ADD and Your Money: A Guide to Personal Finance for Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder by Stephanie Sarkis PhD and Karl Klein JD
Recommended Resources

- Survival Guide for College Students with ADHD or LD by K.G. Nadeau
- ADD and the College Student: A Guide for High School and College Students with Attention Deficit Disorder by P.O. Quinn
- Test-Taking Power Strategies: Improve Your Test Scores by Learning Express
Recommended Resources

- Becoming a Master Student (10th ed.) by S. Ellis
- College Rules! How to Study, Survive, and Succeed in College (2nd ed.) by S. Nist-Olejnik & J.P. Holschuh
- Been There, Should Have Done That II: More Tips for Making the Most of College by S. Tyler
- How to Become a Straight-A Student: The Unconventional Strategies Real College Students Use to Score High While Studying Less by C. Newport
References


