

do next can be confusing. Add attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) to the mix, and the issues become even more complex. Fortunately, recent research and the clinical experiences of physicians who treat teens with AD/HD offer help for those preparing to transition to college or work. What follows are several ideas for teens and their families to ensure success as the student transitions from high school to the next stage in life.

Editor's Note: The National Resource Center on AD/HD (NRC) has developed several information and resource sheets on topics most relevant to adults with AD/HD, including "College Issues for Students with AD/HD" and "Guidelines for Succeeding in the Workplace with AD/HD." These materials can be accessed at www.help4adhd.org/en/about/irslist.

Plan Ahead

As a person with AD/HD, you are entitled to reasonable accommodations for standardized tests, which are typically required for admittance to college. For example, both the SAT and ACT organizations can arrange for testing under special circumstances if your medical situation warrants it. For young people with AD/HD, extended time for testing is often requested and, with proper documentation, granted. Examination results are not marked as being any different from standard testing. However, it is important to begin the process soon enough to get the proper approvals. A good place to start is with your school's guidance counselor. You will need documentation of your need for special arrangements from your health professional. You will need time for them to generate a report and for the testing board to review and approve accommodations. In short: start early.

If your intent is to enter the military, you also need to do some research. The regulations about whether students with AD/HD can enlist vary with the military's needs and seem to change fairly frequently. Your acceptance may even depend on an individual recruiter's understanding of your situation. Currently, a person must be off all medication for any behavioral disorder for at least one year before any of the services will consider him or her as a recruit. No accommodations for testing to qualify for enlistment are allowed. The NRC has a summary of the current requirements on its Web site, ¹ (www.help4adhd.org). Talking to a military recruiter early in the process can also be a way to learn more.

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Get Your Medical Care Squared Away

It is often harder to get insurance and medical care after leaving high school. Parental health policies may not provide adequate coverage. Federal and state-supported programs, including Medicaid, State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), may end once you become 18 years old.² The average medical costs incurred by patients with AD/HD are about twice those of patients without the disorder.³

Having proper medical support and funds to cover care is important for anyone transitioning out of high school. Since individuals with AD/HD benefit from careful monitoring of their condition, medication treatment and sophisticated medical knowledge, making proper arrangements is essential.

It also may be harder for you to find adequate adult-oriented medical care. 4 Pediatricians may not be comfortable taking care of young adult patients or may have limitations in their ability to admit these patients to children's hospitals. Family practitioners, internists and gynecologists may feel uncomfortable dealing with the problems of the young adult with a chronic condition. Psychiatrists are generally not in a position to handle primary health care needs. Student health services are rarely available all day, every day, particularly during school vacations. Again, it is helpful to start early. Recent work by J.G. Reiss and colleagues emphasizes the benefit of beginning work with your current physician "envisioning a future" and preparing for a transition into the adult-oriented health care system.⁵

Know Yourself

When young adults begin preparing for college or work after high school, many wonder if they can

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handle their AD/HD without medication. For the majority of those who have successfully responded to medication, however, continuing medical treatment is clearly the best course of action. College and work both require more self-discipline than high school. This is not the best time to change any more variables than necessary, particularly if you move out of your family home. Remember, that people with AD/HD have more traffic accidents and a higher lifetime risk of drug and alcohol abuse than people without the disorder. Medication treatment lowers both of these risks.

Regardless of your medication decision, you need to look at your strengths and weaknesses in dealing with new social settings and time management. Are you more comfortable in a smaller school where there is more individual attention or in a larger school where there may be greater opportunities for finding more varied activities and a wider range of classmates? Would you be better off staying at home, staying in the community or starting over in a new environment? Does the support network of a fraternity or sorority seem like a benefit or a distraction?⁶

If you are going to enter the job market, many of the same questions arise: a larger organization may have more formal structures and support programs available. A smaller work setting may (or may not) be able to accommodate your specific needs for training and modifications in your work environment. It makes sense to ask about such details and conditions before you commit to the work site.

Use Resources

Make early contact with your college's special services department.⁷ By registering, you can gain access to knowledgeable professionals and helpful arrangements, such as a late drop date for courses that become too much to handle.

To enter the workplace, make your best effort to get some early exposure in an area that interests you. Accepting volunteer work rather than a paying position is a good way to see what the field is like. You also will have a chance to connect with others who already work in a given field to find out whether such work is right for you. If you later decide to go back to school, such volunteer experience may get you a closer look by the admissions staff.

Take Your Time

In high school, you may feel a strong pressure to graduate with your class. In college, there is less focus

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on this issue since most classes are open to a wider group of students who are there because of their specific interests, requirements and level of training. This situation is ideal for you as an individual with AD/HD because it can allow you to progress at your own speed and control the amount and complexity of the work.

Remember: moving beyond high school can be fun and exciting if you prepare carefully for what lies ahead.

Edward M. Gotlieb M.D., FAAP, FSAM, is a practicing pediatrician and the medical director of the Pediatric Center, Stone Mountain, Ga. He is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Work Group on Adolescents with AD/HD.

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