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WELCOME to our 2nd article in our series on ADHD.

I hope you have all settled well into your studies and the New Year.

Last month, we discussed how impairment in your Executive Functions could affect your ability to learn. I hope that you have been on the look out for the symptoms discussed. If so, you should have a lot of questions.

We will be therefore take a deeper look at adult ADHD and how adults with present symptoms differently from children. Few people are aware that inattention increases with age, hyperactivity decreases and impulsivity continues.

Remember to keep your ears and eyes open. There is a lot you can learn by observation. A nurse with good observation skills is an invaluable asset to any doctor.

Dr. Shabeer Jeeva

ADHD SYMPTOMS IN ADULTS

Adult ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) affects 4.4 % of adults. The symptoms are the same as in children - inattention, distractibility, and impulsivity. However adults present the above symptoms differently.

There are many people, who experienced some symptoms as children, but did not need medication as they only became problems in adulthood. This is because as adults, we have ever increasing responsibilities like marriage, family, job, and finances. Our brain's ability to filter and prioritize the demands placed upon it may be overwhelmed.

We are expected to be mature, responsible adults, controlling our anger and fears, listening to and hearing our spouses and bosses, explicit and implied instructions. To be able to focus, concentrate, read required reports and instructions. If we have ADHD, this can result in us becoming "stressed out", depressed, overly anxious, turn to alcohol, drugs, or abuse medication.

Help is available for all the above comorbidities, but unless the ADHD is successfully treated, improvement may be temporary. You will still struggle unnecessarily and have a higher risk of relapsing.

Most adults who seek help for ADHD, experience significant problems in one or more areas of their lives. Their most common complaints include:

- Inconsistent performance in jobs or careers.
- Losing or quitting jobs frequently.
- A history of academic and/or career underachievement.
- Poor ability to manage day-to-day responsibilities.
- Relationship problems due to not completing tasks.
- Forgetting important things, or getting upset easily over minor things.
- Chronic stress and worry about failure to accomplish goals and meet responsibilities.
- Experiencing excessive conflict and distress in a marriage
- Getting into financial trouble because of impulsive spending or failing to pay bills on time

SYMPTOMS ADULT INATTENTION

- **Fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, work or other activities** - This can cause costly errors in the workplace. These adults have difficulty remembering where they put things, etc. Tasks that require detail and are tedious (e.g. income tax preparation become very stressful.)
- **Often has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities** - They never seem to complete the little jobs, like tidying a room or mowing the lawn without forgetting the objective and starting something else. This inability extends to being unable to sit down and do boring jobs, to keep accounts, write letters or pay bills. They are unable to finish reading a book, even though they do not have a reading disorder.
- **Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly** – Their spouses and bosses complain that they do not listen, that it is difficult to get their attention, that they “tune out” when spoken to, or when they have heard what is said they “forget” and do not follow through with the job.
- **Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (not due to oppositional behaviours or failure to understand the instructions)** – These adults have difficulties following other peoples instructions; they are unable to read/follow directions in manuals for appliances. They also fail to keep commitments.
- **Often has difficulty organising tasks or activities** – They are always late for work, miss appointments and fail to meet critical deadlines. These people often delegate organisational responsibilities to others (e.g. the spouse at home or the secretary at work).
- **Often avoids, dislikes or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (such as schoolwork or homework)** – These adults complain of procrastinating. Their mail piles up unopened. They off tasks like paying bills, preparing taxes, organising old papers, writing a will or getting insurance. Their spouses complain they cannot finish washing the dishes or get ready for a party.

- **Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities (e.g. toys, school assignments, pencils, books or tools).** - These parents have “lost” their children or “forgotten” them somewhere. They forget where they parked the car, can never find their keys and lose their wallets/purses frequently. Work assignments are often “lost”.
- **Is often easily distracted by extraneous stimuli** – Their coping mechanisms for distraction include, increasing the amount of “white noise”, multitasking, creating an “emergency” or absolute quiet.
- **Is often forgetful in daily activities** – Adults complain of “memory” problems. They go to the shop with a list of things to buy, but come home with a bargain instead of the milk. Planning is difficult because when information is given about where or when something will happen, it is forgotten.

SYMPTOMS OF ADULT HYPERACTIVITY

- **Often fidgets with hands, feet or squirms in seat** – You will notice them picking their fingers, shaking their knees, tapping their hands or feet, talking with their hands or constantly changing their position.
- **Often leaves seat in classroom, or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected** – These adults are restless, they are unable to sit still during conversations and experience frustration during long dinners in restaurants. They also have strong internal feeling of restlessness when waiting.
- **Often runs about or climbs excessively in situations in which it is inappropriate (in adolescents or adults, may be limited to subjective feelings of restlessness)** - These adults cannot live without their cell phones, which they repeatedly answer. They feel the need to be on the go and pace or fidget during appointments and prefer stimulating and/or reckless activities instead of the more sedate types of recreation.
- **Often difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly** – Adults complain that they are workaholics. They are unwilling to just stay at home, watch TV or engage other quiet activities.
- **Is “often on the go” or acts as if “driven by a motor”**- People around them can find them exhausting because of the frantic pace they keep and seem to expect of others. They can be compulsive exercisers and their holidays are draining, since there is no opportunity to rest.
- **Often talks excessively** – This talking makes dialogue difficult. It prevents “a sense of intimacy” or the feeling of “being heard”. Their constant chatter interferes with appropriate social behaviour at parties, and can also be experienced as nagging. Clowning around, repartee, or other means of dominating conversations can mask a basic inability to engage in give-and-take conversation.

SYMPTOMS OF ADULT IMPULSIVITY

- **Often blurts out or answers before questions have been completed** – These people never let you finish sentences. They feel that other people talk too slowly and experience impatience having to wait for them to finish.
- **Often has difficulty waiting his turn** – As parents they are unable to wait for their children to finish tasks at their own pace, they feel irritated when waiting in lines at bank machines and restaurants. They may be aware of their intense efforts to force themselves to wait. Some will compensate for this by ensuring that they carry something at all times.
- **Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g. butt into conversations or games).** – This is most often experienced by adults as social ineptness at cocktail parties or even with close friends. They are unable to watch others doing and/or struggling with a task, without jumping in to try themselves.

Those who have hyperactivity in childhood tend to lose some or much of the hyperactivity as they mature into adulthood. Hence, the diagnosis is more often missed in adults. However, the inattention symptoms do not tend to diminish from childhood to adulthood as hyperactivity symptoms do.

ADHD in children, who are inattentive but not hyperactive, is often missed in childhood. Because there are more girls than boys in this category, they are much less likely to be diagnosed.

By Tanya Sibilant – Research & Development – ADHD CLINIC

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