



The Sloane Court Clinic

A private clinic in Chelsea, London providing psychiatric and psychological care.

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Information about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

What does this document contain?

This document is for people who have been given a diagnosis of ADHD, or have requested information about ADHD. We hope that it will provide some useful information about ADHD and help you to understand what can be done to treat it.

We recommend that you read it over a few times as we often find that people have difficulty taking in and remembering information after being given any diagnosis. That is why we have produced this information. If you have any questions after reading it, please do feel free to raise them in your next session with your psychiatrist or psychologist, if you are seeing one.

What is ADHD?

ADHD is what doctors describe as a **developmental disorder**, which means that it is a problem that is present from childhood. The term developmental disorder does not indicate the cause of the problem, and often with problems that begin in childhood it is very difficult or impossible to know what caused them to happen. There may be a genetic component (i.e. you inherited it from parents) or there may be other reasons, such as damage to the brain in early life. You may understandably wish to have a clear answer in your case, but unfortunately it is unlikely that any doctor would be able to give a clear answer as to the cause. We would gently advise that accepting that you may never know the cause may be more helpful to you than pursuing this line of enquiry.

ADHD is now a commonly accepted disorder in children. Only more recently has it been recognised as a problem experienced by adults. This means that very often adults with ADHD have had problems since childhood and their difficulties in adulthood have not been properly recognised. Adults with ADHD may feel that they have been blamed or held responsible for things over which they have had little control. For example they may have been told that they were lazy in school, or that they are rude in social interactions. Children who have problems paying attention may very well have performed badly in school, even though they were not lazy and adults who have problems with inattention and impulsivity may very well appear rude in social situations, even though they have no intention of being so. Adults with ADHD therefore have to cope, not only with their own difficulties, but often with the negative perceptions and reactions of others.

We hope that by giving you some information about ADHD we can help you to better understand the disorder and the effect it may have on you and on the people in your life. We also hope that as you come to understand the disorder, you will be able to see the possibilities for getting help to change and to manage some of the difficulties. There are treatments and therapies available and information about some of them is included in this document.

The symptoms of ADHD

There are three core symptoms of ADHD, by which we mean symptoms that need to be present in order for the diagnosis to be given:

- **Inattention:** Examples of this symptom would include having problems paying attention to work or study, problems sustaining attention, problems listening to others, starting, but not finishing tasks, jumping from one task to another, procrastinating, having problems organizing yourself, being forgetful, being easily distracted.
- **Hyperactivity:** Examples of this symptom would include fidgeting, feeling restless, being always on the go, talking excessively.
- **Impulsivity:** Examples of this symptom would include finding that you interrupt others, finding it difficult to wait your turn, or starting things before you've made a plan.

Your doctor will have been assessing the presence of these symptoms during your diagnostic assessment. It is expected that these symptoms will have been present since childhood, usually before the age of seven. Not everyone will experience all three symptoms to the same degree and some of them are more commonly found in children than in adults. Your doctor will be able to tell you how the symptoms present in your case. A diagnosis of adult Deficit Disorder (ADD) is made in those who show prominent inattentive symptoms.

People who have experienced some combination of these core symptoms throughout life may find that they have developed other difficulties or psychological distresses as a consequence. For example, children who have ADHD may find it difficult to make and keep friends due to their behaviour, which can seem boisterous and aggressive to other children. This difficulty may continue into adult life – even though the boisterousness may diminish in adulthood, the young adult may have developed problems with social confidence or self esteem, or have low expectations of friendships working out. Adults may have difficulty forming relationships with those with ADHD who may seem impulsive or impatient. Children who had problems in school due to ADHD may have performed poorly in academic tests and in adulthood feel they have failed to reach their potential. The experience of these kinds of losses and failures can lead to feelings of depression and dissatisfaction with work or with the life they have. Adults who experience feelings of hyperactivity may find they are aggressive or agitated and may use or misuse drugs or alcohol to manage these feelings. There may be difficulties sleeping. These are some common examples of problems experienced by adults that are not core symptoms of ADHD, but which can be associated with the disorder.

Getting help with ADHD

There is help available for adults with ADHD and many people are finding that the treatments available can help them to move on with their lives and overcome many of the difficulties caused by the disorder. We hope that the information below will give you a realistic understanding of what is available and hope for the future.

You may feel you require help with the core symptoms, with the associated symptoms or with both.

Medication

There are several medications available that treat the core symptoms of ADHD. They are not described at length here, as it is very important that any discussion about medication is held on an individual basis with your doctor. Medical treatment of the core symptoms can help to reduce the feelings of restlessness, agitation, and impulsivity and help you to better concentrate, focus, organize, and listen to others. Effective treatment of the core symptoms may in itself bring about a positive change in your life.

Current research into the efficacy of medication for ADHD indicates that some people respond better than others. It does not work the same way for everyone and some people find that their symptoms improve, but don't go away altogether. Others find that it doesn't help significantly.

You may also wish to consider whether your ADHD has caused some of the associated problems described above, such as depression, problems in relationships, problems at work, or alcohol or drug use. These problems, if present, may have developed over a long period of time and might not be helped directly by the ADHD medication even if your core symptoms respond well. The important message is that medication can help some people a great deal, but it might not be a 'magic bullet' that solves all of the problems caused by the disorder.

It may therefore be necessary to also consider psychological therapy, which may be useful to help you cope and manage with both core symptoms and other associated problems.

Psychological therapy

Psychological therapies for ADHD are relatively new. The approach being used at the Sloane Court Clinic is based on the Young-Bramham model of working, which draws in a variety of methods to help you manage the difficulties you experience in everyday life. The therapist may ask you to consider different things, such as how you think in situations and how you behave. They may ask you to describe how you go about everyday things that you find difficult, and find ways to change your thinking, your behaviour, or the situation itself.

The intention in psychological therapy is not to make the disorder disappear, but to help you to understand it, to become aware of how it affects your life, and to develop ways of managing it so that the negative impact on your life is reduced. The therapist may ask you to make a list of the most problematic things for you. They may help you to identify things you may wish to change in yourself, for example to stop and think more, which might sound obvious, but they will also help you practice specific ways of doing that so that your good intention becomes something that you actually do. They may also help you to identify ways to change or organize the world around you to help you to better remember and plan things. The benefit of doing this might be that you find you are more able to complete tasks and feel good about your abilities instead of feeling weighed down and guilty about things started, but not finished.

You may find the psychological strategies helpful in your working life and personal life. You should find that you can take strategies learned in one situation and apply them to others so that you eventually become therapist to yourself.

The therapist may also work with you in reducing the impact of the associated problems such as depression, insomnia, or substance misuse, if these things are getting in the way of your life.

The key point for those considering psychological therapy is that it can be very effective and very rewarding, but will require dedication, commitment and effort from you. It depends greatly on your ability and willingness to work with the therapist and try things out. The number of sessions will vary and may depend on how quickly and how well you are able to apply the psychological strategies to your own life, so it is difficult to predict the number of sessions required. We would recommend having regular review sessions to monitor on your progress and to ensure that the therapy is helpful for you. Your therapist will realize that often people with ADHD have difficulty with things such as focus, regular attendance and commitment, and will discuss and help you with those, so don't worry too much about that. You don't have to be perfect or an expert, but you do have to want to do it.

We hope that this information has been helpful and we expect that it will raise more questions than it answers, as ADHD is a disorder that affects people in different ways; therefore it is not possible to cover all aspects of the disorder or the available treatments in one document. If you do have any questions about ADHD in general or any specific questions about how this information applies to you then please do ask your doctor or psychologist and they will discuss it with you.

References

Young, S. and Bramham, J (2007). *ADHD in Adults: A Psychological Guide to Practice*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

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