

## **Adults Dealing With Untreated ADD/ADHD**

**By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are not suddenly afflicted with the condition. Adults do not develop ADD/ADHD due to multitasking, being overwhelmed, or consuming too much coffee. If you have ADD/ADHD as an adult, it means you had it as a child. It may have gone undiagnosed. Discovering your ADD/ADHD as an adult, along with a diagnosis and possible medication, does not "cure" the impact it has had on your life.

The symptoms of ADD/ADHD that you have experienced, adapted to, and compensated for have significantly affected various aspects of your life. You may feel relieved to have a diagnosis, making sense of your experiences finally. However, you have adapted to ADD/ADHD in numerous ways—some beneficial, some detrimental.

Possible physical effects of untreated ADD/ADHD include difficulty following a medication regimen, forgetting or avoiding checkups and doctor visits, accidents, injuries, and neglect of self-care. Mental health effects can involve frustration, disappointment, low self-esteem, difficulty making decisions, anxiety, unmanaged stress, and poor social awareness. Compulsive behaviors, such as overeating, substance abuse, and other addictions, may develop as a means to self-medicate uncomfortable feelings.

Many adults with ADD/ADHD find their careers impacted by the condition. You may have struggled to get through high school and college. As an adult, you might feel you're not reaching your potential, stagnating, or that others do not recognize your true abilities. People with ADD/ADHD often have trouble following workplace rules or a chain of command, maintaining a job, learning new tasks and skills, consistently showing up on time, meeting deadlines, or completing tasks promptly. Financial

difficulties may also arise, with challenges in managing money, paying bills on time, or curbing impulsive spending.

Consider the relationship problems that often accompany ADD/ADHD. Symptoms can significantly impact your most important relationships. Family members might perceive you as irresponsible if you struggle to keep track of time. They may see difficulty focusing in conversations or interrupting others as insensitivity, rudeness, or lack of interest.

Major organizational issues can lead others to believe you don't care about cleanliness or expect them to clean up after you. They might view your inability to keep appointments, be on time, or track essential items as a lackadaisical attitude. These organizational difficulties can result in others feeling compelled to pick up the slack, "remind," "nag," or "instruct" you in daily tasks, which fosters anger and hurt, as they believe that if they were important to you, you'd attend to them yourself.

Let the impact of your untreated ADD/ADHD guide your adult treatment. Assess its effects on your physical and emotional health (including self-esteem and self-efficacy) and interpersonal behavioral health. Identify the areas most affected by your ADD/ADHD and set goals and objectives to correct or mitigate the damage that continues to affect **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2012 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language and concepts, clarity and accuracy.**

### *Building Self Esteem: A Workbook*

*By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.*

*Understanding the profound impact of untreated ADD/ADHD on your life is the first step toward effective management and improvement. As you explore further the challenges posed by ADD/ADHD, you will begin to notice the impact that untreated ADD/ADHD has had on your self-esteem and self-confidence. To rebuild self-esteem, which is often significantly affected by the condition, avail yourself of "Building Self Esteem: A Workbook," a resource designed to help you strengthen your self-worth and develop a positive self-image.*

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