

# SANTI SAYS: ADD & ADHD, What does it all mean?

By Santi Meunier



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Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are common diagnoses for children and some adults these days. What does it really mean, and how is it currently being diagnosed? The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), is a psychiatric diagnostic manual used by professionals. This manual makes ADHD officially a psychiatric diagnosis which can then be covered by many insurance companies. Many of the symptoms of ADHD and ADD are common to many of us who live busy, stressful lives which is why it is so important to define the syndrome carefully. Currently there are an estimated four million children and ten million adults in the United States who are being treated for these disorders by a professional. As a professional myself, I question whether everyone is being diagnosed correctly. If you or your child is having many of the problems that I will outline below I urge you to not rush to labeling and subsequently medicating your child or yourself without completing a very thorough diagnostic interview with a professional.

## What Else Could it Be?

David Hauser and Alan Zametkin in 1993 in the New

England Journal of Medicine proposed a biological basis for ADD. In their study they found a strong correlation between a rare thyroid condition called generalized resistance to thyroid hormone (GRTH). The data demonstrated that 70% of the people studied who had GRTH also had ADD. They demonstrated that in certain cases their may be a genetic link to the disorder.

On the other hand, another example would be a child sick with chronic ear infections who, as a result, demonstrates many of the ADHD symptoms such as fidgeting, difficulty hearing or paying attention, poor retention of material studied or taught in class and an overall restlessness. Also, our bodies need proper nutrition to function properly and the current U.S. diet is laden with chemicals and empty calories. Junk food is just that-junk! Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) can cause many behavioral problems and maladies. When our blood sugar drops we often crave sweets which can temporarily "stop" the problem only to be made worse after the sugar "rush", inducing even lower levels of blood sugar. At this point the body releases adrenaline to attempt to normalize the blood sugar level. An over abundance of adrenaline in the body triggers the "fight or

flight" (Block) response. This can create the appearance of ADHD. It is hard to sit still when you are pumped up with sugar and adrenaline. Mary Ann Block, an Osteopath and author of NO MORE RITALIN: Treating ADHD Without Drugs, works with children with chronic health problems. This is a good read for anyone wanting to explore alternatives to the allopathic medical approach.

## What To Look For In Diagnosing ADD & ADHD

Another excellent book that I use as a reference for my patients with ADD and ADHD is Dr. Hallowell and Dr. Ratey's book, DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION: recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood through Adulthood. For the purposes of this article I will outline briefly the criteria for diagnosis which can be read in depth in the aforementioned book (pgs.73-76).

- A sense of underachievement.
- Difficulty getting organized
- Chronic procrastination.
- Trouble following through on tasks.
- Saying what comes to mind without thinking first.
- Search for high stimulation.
- Intolerant of boredom.
- Easily distracted.
- Often very creative and intelligent/intuitive.
- 10. Trouble following the "proper" procedure.
- 11. Impatient and frustrated.
- 12. Impulsive.
- 13. Worrier- insecure.
- 14. Mood swings/ erratic.
- 15. Restlessness.
- 16. Low self-esteem and worth.
- 17. Inaccurate self-observation.
- 18. A family history of ADD or ADHD, Bi-Polar Disorder, sub-

stance abuse or addiction.

If at least 15 of these symptoms are present it is considered a chronic condition and a professional should be consulted for a treatment plan.

## Success is Possible

Medication and behavioral psychotherapy have proven to be very effective in both children and adults. A majority of research therapies are multi-component packages which include: identifying and labeling different emotions positive self-talk techniques, relaxation techniques including meditation, guided visualization to reduce fear and anxiety-worry, role-playing, coping skills, self-calming techniques, art therapy and so on. Medication alone does not cure the disorder and there is still no long-term clinical study on the long-term effects of using medication - especially on children - as of yet. The good news is that when these treatments are used together, along with parental participation, in the case of children, there is a 76% success rate (AMHCA clinical trails 1999).