

# Distractibility, Inattention, and Disorganization: Do I Have ADD or ADHD?

Sure, everyone is on the go these days—but does your life feel like the Indy Racing League? Do you spend more time in overdrive than Danica Patrick? Things can get so hectic that many people feel that they have [ADD<sup>\[1\]</sup>](#)—or at the very least, that they suffer from [ADD<sup>\[2\]</sup>](#) moments. For example, one driver in the thick of the rat race took off from the gas station with the nozzle still in her tank!

Everyone has distracted moments—both amusing and less so—but when a person has a disability such as ADD or [ADHD<sup>\[3\]</sup>](#), things take a more serious turn. The feelings attached to [ADD<sup>\[4\]</sup>](#) include confusion, frustration, and sadness when you can't move from intention to action. At home or work, your relationships might suffer due to disorganization and inconsistent [behavior<sup>\[5\]</sup>](#). In fact, your job might be jeopardized because your work is late, incomplete, or inaccurate.

Let's look at some facts about ADD and [ADHD<sup>\[6\]</sup>](#): people have long observed a cluster of symptoms that occur in a person of average or above average intelligence who seems unable to function in a competent, masterful way.

- AD/HD is a neurobiological disorder. Three major characteristics are inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. A person may have all or some combination of these traits.
- [Attention Deficit Disorder<sup>\[7\]</sup>](#) (ADD) is used to describe a person who is inattentive but does not have hyperactivity and/or impulsiveness as primary symptoms.
- It is estimated that 8 million (one in 20) adults in the US have AD/HD and the majority have not been formally diagnosed or treated.
- AD/HD usually becomes noticeable during childhood. According to a recent study reported in the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, there is a prevalence rate of AD/HD at 8.7 percent for children ages 8 to 15 years old.
- AD/HD often runs in families. According to research, if one person in a [family<sup>\[8\]</sup>](#) has AD/HD, there is a 25% to 35% chance that another [family<sup>\[9\]</sup>](#) member also has the disorder.
- Only a professional, such as a psychiatrist, neuropsychologist, psychologist, or physician can properly diagnose a person.

The diagnostic criteria for Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) is listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV) of the American Psychiatric Association.

Some common symptoms of AD/HD include:

- Inattention to details
- Easily distracted
- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Disorganization at work and at home
- Loses or forgets important things
- Poor sense of time
- Poor listening to directions
- Restlessness
- Interrupting or blurting out answer
- Difficulty with relationships

While some of these symptoms may sound common, a person with AD/HD has a variety of symptoms that are excessive, long-term, and pervasive. These symptoms create significant barriers to performance and satisfaction in several areas of life. [ADHD<sup>\[10\]</sup>](#) is a complex condition and individuals may differ significantly in the number, combination, and severity of the symptoms.

New evidence points to AD/HD as impairment of self-regulation and executive functioning. These two

complex functions enable a person to see a task through from beginning to end by coordinating multiple processes, starting and stopping mental operations, and maintaining [motivation<sup>\[11\]</sup>](#) and persistence.

After being diagnosed with AD/HD as children, some people claim that they have “gotten over it.” However, these people are especially vulnerable as their life becomes more complicated and the insidious effects of inconsistent attention take their toll. Also vulnerable are gifted but “spacey, flakey” people, who chalk up numerous ADD symptoms as “quirks.” Their lives also begin to disintegrate when their old methods of compensating are no longer effective.

There is both surprise and relief when an otherwise competent person discovers that there’s a scientific basis for the nagging and disabling problems that surround them and hold them back. In the groundbreaking book about adults with ADD, Dr. Edward Hallowell describes his feelings when he was 31 years old, completing his training in child psychiatry at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center in Boston. During a lecture describing ADD, he had an “Aha!” experience: “So there’s a name for what I am! I thought to myself with relief and mounting excitement. There’s a term for it, a diagnosis, an actual condition, when all along I’d thought I was just slightly daft.” He and co-author John Ratey opened the door to understanding adult ADD.

If you’re wondering about whether or not you have ADD or ADHD, “Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with [Attention Deficit Disorder<sup>\[12\]</sup>](#) from Childhood through Adulthood” is a great resource (Hallowell, Edward M., M.D. and Ratey, John J., M. D. New York: Touchstone, 1995.) If you don’t like to read, it’s also available as an audio book.

You don’t need to be a reckless driver on the racetrack of life: your first pit stop should be your physician’s office, where you can get a screening to see if the frequency and intensity of your symptoms indicate a diagnosis and/or the need for further testing.

Author's Bio:

Geraldine Markel, Ph.D. is principal of Managing Your Mind Coaching & Seminars and author of Defeating the 8 Demons of Distraction: Increasing Productivity and Decreasing Stress and co author of Finding Your Focus: Practical Strategies for the Everyday Challenges Facing Adults with ADD and Helping Adolescents with ADD and/or Learning Disabilities. At the University of Michigan, Dr. Markel served as faculty in the School of Education. She coaches adults and adolescents with ADD and/or learning disabilities and specializes in working with independent professionals, writers, and graduate students. For more information, visit [managingyourmind.com<sup>\[13\]</sup>](#).

Additional Resources covering Adult ADD / ADHD can be found at:

[Website Directory for Adult ADD / ADHD<sup>\[14\]</sup>](#)

[Articles on Adult ADD / ADHD<sup>\[15\]</sup>](#)

[Products for Adult ADD / ADHD<sup>\[16\]</sup>](#)

[Discussion Board<sup>\[17\]</sup>](#)

[Geraldine Markel, the Official Guide to Adult ADD / ADHD<sup>\[18\]</sup>](#)