

# What doctors, teachers and parents need to know about Adult ADHD

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# Experience

- 16 years of private practice in Central London
- Addictions specialist
- Treated >150 Adult ADHD cases since 2000
- Controversial: Adult ADHD treatment originally misdiagnosed as addiction
- NHS services still patchy and difficult to access
- Still a very stigmatised condition

# Diagnosing ADHD (1)

**Inattention:** Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in work or other activities

Often has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks

Often doesn't seem to listen when spoken to directly

Often doesn't follow through on instructions and fails to finish tasks

Often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities

Often avoids, dislikes or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort

Often loses items necessary for tasks or activities

Is often easily distracted

Is often forgetful in daily activities

# Diagnosing ADHD (2)

## Hyperactivity and Impulsivity:

Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat

Often leaves the room when remaining seated is expected

Often is physically active or restless in inappropriate situations

Often has difficulty quietly engaging in leisure activities

Is often "on the go" or often acts as if "driven by a motor"

Often talks too much

Often blurts out answers before questions are completed

Often has difficulty awaiting turn

Often interrupts or intrudes on others' conversations

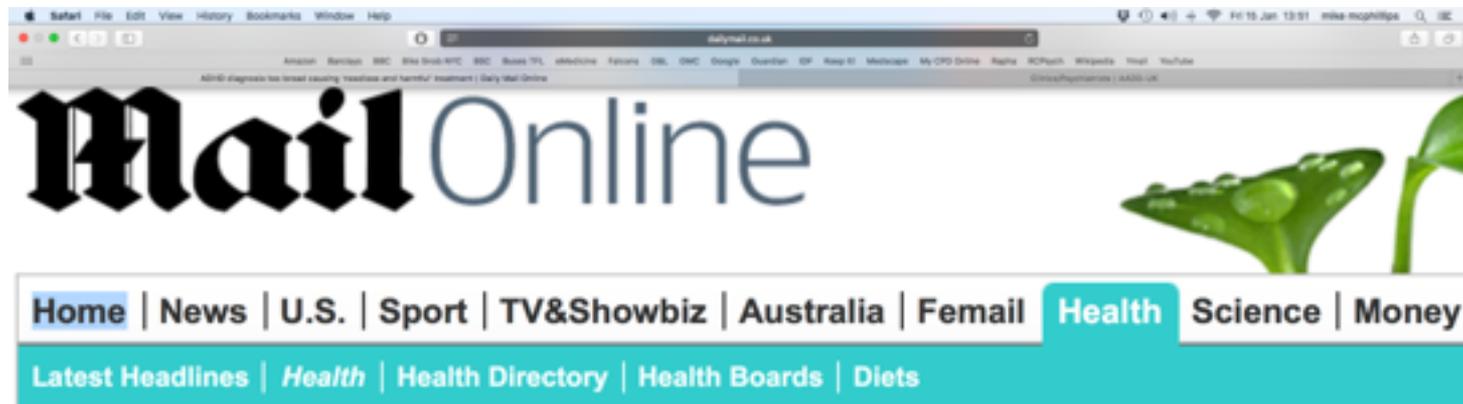
# Diagnosing ADHD (3)

- Has inattentive or hyperactive-impulsive signs and symptoms that caused impairment and were present as a child
- Had behaviors that weren't normal for children the same age who didn't have ADHD
- Has symptoms for at least six months
- Has symptoms in more than one setting that significantly impair performance at school or work or negatively impact home life or relationships

# Psychiatric Comorbidity

- Antisocial behaviour
- Substance abuse/dependence
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Car accidents
- Lower educational attainment
- Lower incomes and worse jobs

# What does the Daily Mail say?



## **ADHD diagnosis may have become too broad causing 'needless and harmful' treatment for children, warns study**

- Wider classification of ADHD symptoms has seen rise in diagnosis
- Prescriptions for treatments increased twofold in children over five years
- Use of stimulant drugs such as Ritalin increase fourfold in adults

# Isn't it usually over-diagnosed?

- No. It is hugely under-diagnosed, even in children (currently 1;10 to 1:5)
- 3-5% of adults have it in one form or another, usually inattention >> hyperactivity
- A tiny proportion of adults get diagnosed or treated

## Isn't it just hyperactive boys who have it?

Most people think of a typical case as being a noisy, disruptive, overactive boy aged 6-10, who is struggling with reading and writing and who is always in trouble at school

In fact, among adults, inattention symptoms predominate, my patients include doctors, lawyers, dentists, sportsmen, actors, artists, hedge fund managers, bankers...

# Which cases do we miss?

- Anyone over 30
- Children who don't grow out of it
- Highly intelligent
- Not hyperactive
- Well-behaved
- Already diagnosed with another developmental disorder (ASD, dyslexia or dyspraxia)
- Girls with ADD

# Disability vs Handicap

- Disability
  - Impaired concentration
- Handicap
  - Schools
  - Positions of trust
  - Higher Education
  - Job prospects (eg Police, Army)
  - Marriage prospects
  - Self esteem and confidence

## Isn't the medication addictive or harmful?

- No – rates of progression to substance abuse are lower in treated patient than non-treated

AND

- No – no evidence of growth slowing, CVS problems, psychosis, eating disorder unless prior history

# Don't students use it as a smart drug?

- Yes, up to 17% use it episodically to cram

BUT

- They don't actually make you smarter, just (briefly) more interested and less tired

UNLESS

- You actually have ADD! (70% show definite and sustained improvement in a range of cognitive and behavioural variables)

# “Dear Dr McPhillips....”

“...I had to work the whole of Sunday and have to say that the effect has been transformational. This has quite literally changed my life. I can focus on what people are saying and not panic that I am missing things; read reams of uninteresting legal adjudications; and when I get home, I have enough concentration power and energy left to read for myself and to devote to my family. I can listen!.....

It's like suddenly being able to swim and glide through the water with ease, whereas before it felt like constantly battling with waves, and forcing myself to make headway. This email has taken me five minutes to write on the train for instance. It would have taken 15 minutes before. I've read the paper, written a script and commented on a paper and I'm not at work yet. Thank you for listening, for opening my eyes, and for liberating me and allowing me to be myself for the first time, by freeing me of the shackles of a undisciplined racing mind”.