

Attention Deficit Disorder / Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Current opinion is that these conditions are caused by insufficient activity of the neurotransmitter, which maintains synaptic connections and which focuses and sustains attention. For example, norepinephrine is associated with focused attention and maintenance of mental arousal, and a deficiency causes attention to wander involuntarily. Similarly, acetylcholine is associated with voluntary and involuntary motor activity, and a deficiency of that chemical causes involuntary muscular movement.

When these chemicals are insufficient, voluntary effort to pay attention and to suppress activity is not possible. Increased effort to organize is unproductive. Stimulants may be used medically to increase the synaptic connections. For non-prescriptive assistance, informally, individuals may turn to caffeine and other stimulants.

Considerations

The academic manifestations of ADD/ADHD include distractibility in class and while doing homework, impulsive and unplanned reactions to environmental stimuli, inability to maintain regular schedules of any type, and the habit of procrastination until urgency helps to focus attention.

- When a singular work assignment is being procrastinated, the technique often has moderate success.
- When work assignments are long and complex, last minute efforts cannot be compressed into the available remaining time.
- Because of the inability to correctly perceive the passage of time, the following behaviors are frequently manifested: poor nutrition, insufficient rest and sleep, as well as the development of communicable infections.
- The student may experience a reasonable uncertainty about due dates being met, causing anxiety about performance quality to occur.
- The individual often becomes discouraged and expresses emotional detachment.
- ADD/ADHD may serve to undermine mental health, especially after individuals with these disabilities have made exhaustive efforts over a period of time to produce quality work without success.

Instructional Strategies

The following strategies are suggested to enhance the accessibility of course instruction, materials, and activities for students ADD/ADHD.

- Include a disability access statement in the course syllabus such as: “To obtain disability related accommodations and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact Access Services as soon as possible by calling (507) 457-1465.”
- Keep instructions as brief and uncomplicated as possible. Repeat exactly without paraphrasing.
- Assist the student in finding effective peer note takers from the class.
- Allow the student to record lectures.
- Clearly define course requirements, the dates of exams and when assignments are due. Provide advance notice of any changes.
- Present lecture information in both an auditory and a visual format (e.g. chalkboard, overheads, PowerPoint slides, handouts, etc.).
- Use more than one way to demonstrate or explain information.
- Have copies of the syllabus ready no less than six weeks prior to the beginning of the semester so textbooks can be converted in as timely a manner as possible.
- When teaching, state objectives, review previous lessons and summarize periodically.
- Allow time for clarification of directions and essential information.
- Provide study guides or review sheets for exams.
- Provide alternative ways for the students to do tasks (e.g., substituting oral for written work).
- Refer the student to the Writing Lab for help in proofreading written work. Stress organization and ideas rather than mechanics when grading in-class writing assignments.
- Allow the use of spell-check and grammar-assistive devices when appropriate to the course.

- When in doubt about how to assist the student, ask him or her as privately as possible without drawing attention to the student or the disability.

These guidelines were adapted from guidelines used by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Winona State University.