

Study shows medication improves performance in college students with ADHD

December 1 2011, By Jan Wenzel

College students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) who take a prostimulant medication can improve attention and organization and planning skills, according to results of the first study to look at the medical treatment of ADHD among this population.

This is important news since a recent report found one in 20 college freshmen were diagnosed with ADHD in 2010.

Researchers at the University of Rhode Island and Lehigh University found approximately 86 percent of [college students](#) who participated in the study experienced a reduction in ADHD symptoms and 73 percent had improved organization and planning skills. The researchers concluded the prostimulant, Vyvanse, is a safe, effective drug to improve performance in college students with ADHD. Because it is a prostimulant rather than a stimulant, there is less chance for abuse.

The study, published online in the [Journal of Attention Disorders](#), was conducted by George DuPaul , professor of school psychology and chair of the department of education and human services at Lehigh, and Lisa Weyandt , professor of psychology at URI and one of the nation's leading researchers on ADHD in college students, along with their colleagues, with funding from Shire Development Inc., makers of Vyvanse.

While Vyvanse is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for adults, no study had looked at the effects of the medication on

college students with ADHD.

“College students are at greater risk for academic and psychological difficulties, considering they are expected to live and act independently,” DuPaul said. “Our research showed students taking Vyvanse had improved attention and other executive functions like planning, organizing and strategizing.”

Compared to what is known about ADHD in children and adolescents, very little empirical information is available regarding ADHD in young adults, especially college students. “

Given that increasing numbers of high school students with ADHD are attending college it is critical that we understand the nature of this disorder in the college student population and develop effective treatment strategies to help these students succeed in college. This study clearly demonstrates that Vyvanse is one possible effective treatment for college students with ADHD and it helps improve their functioning in multiple areas,” Weyandt said.

ADHD is one of the most common disorders of childhood, but symptoms often linger into adulthood. While colleges and universities offer resources to assist students with ADHD, students also take stimulants other than Vyvanse such as Ritalin to treat symptoms. Prior to this study, little information existed about the effectiveness of stimulants in the treatment of ADHD among college students.

Twenty-four college students with ADHD participated in the double blind placebo study. Over five weeks, these students were given weekly dosages of Vyvanse that varied each week from placebo to three different levels of the medication. Students did not know which level of medication they were taking until the study was completed. They reported their symptoms, verbal learning/memory and any adverse side effects, and were evaluated by health professionals. These results were

compared to the results of 26 un-medicated students without ADHD using the same measures. [Medical](#) professionals closely monitored the students during the duration of the study.

Researchers found no evidence of social or emotional withdrawal among participants. Some participants had increased blood pressure and heart rate – a common side effect of the medication - but were managed by professionals at their respective health centers.

“Vyvanse improved students’ symptoms and executive functioning,” DuPaul said. “However, their improvements did not reach the levels of their peers. This tells us that [stimulant](#) medication is an [effective treatment](#) that needs to be supplemented by other treatments, including educational support and accommodations.”

Weyandt added that more studies are needed to better understand the specific needs of college students with [ADHD](#) and to further develop effective pharmacological and nonpharmacological interventions.

Provided by University of Rhode Island

Citation: Study shows medication improves performance in college students with ADHD (2011, December 1) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-12-medication-college-students-adhd.html>

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