

# Adult ADHD has become epidemic—experts explain why

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Children with ADHD find it more difficult to focus and to complete their schoolwork. Credit: public domain image

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder is growing up. Stephen Hinshaw and Katherine Ellison authors of the newly published book, *ADHD: What Everyone Needs to Know*, confirm that adults—and particularly women—are reporting to clinics in record numbers, becoming the fastest-

growing part of the population receiving diagnoses and prescriptions for stimulant medications.

"ADHD was never just for kids, and today many [adults](#) are getting the help they've needed for years," says Hinshaw, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley and a respected global expert on ADHD.

Ellison, a Pulitzer-prize winning journalist, notes, "At least half of all children diagnosed with ADHD will continue to be impaired by their symptoms as adults, suggesting that approximately 10 million U.S. adults qualify for the diagnosis. Adult ADHD can lead to suffering through commonly accompanying disorders such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, antisocial behavior, and gambling or Internet addictions. Social ties may well be frayed, with high risk of difficulties in intimate relationships. And, people with ADHD are also more likely to have a bitter history of academic and professional failures."

Indeed, researchers have found that adults who have been diagnosed with ADHD are up to 14 percent less likely than their peers to have a job. On average they also earn 33 percent less compared with people in similar lines of work and are 15 percent more likely to be receiving some form of government aid. The bottom line is that adult ADHD is not only real but has potentially devastating consequences, the experts agree.

Hinshaw and Ellison also reveal a recent rapid rise in adult prescriptions for ADHD medication. One of the biggest surprises is that women of child-bearing age have become the fastest-growing group of consumers of ADHD medications. From 2002 to 2010, the number of annual prescriptions of generic and brand-name forms of Adderall surged among women over 26 years old, from a total of roughly 800,000 to some 5.4 million.

"One thing we stress is that while medication can sometimes be effective, there is no silver bullet for ADHD," says Hinshaw. "This disorder takes time and careful strategies to manage, over a lifetime."

**More information:**

[global.oup.com/academic/product/adhd-9780190223793](https://global.oup.com/academic/product/adhd-9780190223793)

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