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ADHD Plus: 10 Conditions That May Show Up with Attention Deficit

If you've been diagnosed with ADHD, chances are you may also have another condition. Here's what to be on the lookout for.

ADHD Rarely Travels Alone

Around 80 percent of those with ADHD are diagnosed with at least one other psychiatric disorder sometime during their life. A comorbid condition is a second separate condition that exists alongside ADHD, and needs to be treated in conjunction with attention deficit. There are a number of conditions commonly associated with ADHD.

ADHD and Depression

People with ADHD are three times more likely to develop depression than the general population. Depression and ADHD share some symptoms, such as inattention, sleep problems, and lack of motivation, but the causes of symptoms are different. With ADHD, you may lack motivation because you are overwhelmed. With depression, you may not want to do anything at all. If feelings of sadness, lethargy, or insomnia persist, despite ADHD treatment, talk to your doctor. Treatments for depression are available.

ADHD and Learning Disabilities

ADHD impacts learning and behaviors in school, but the condition is different than a learning disability. Children with ADHD are three to five times more likely to develop a learning disability as those without ADHD. Around one-half of all those with ADHD also have some type of LD. Those with learning disabilities may have trouble organizing thoughts, finding the right word to use when speaking, mastering reading, writing, or math, or having difficulty with memory or reasoning.

ADHD and Anxiety

About one-fourth of those with ADHD also have an anxiety disorder. As with depression, the two share common symptoms, such as lack of focus and insomnia. Nervousness is also a possible side effect of stimulants. If you have unexplained and persistent fears, or experience panic attacks, and feel that your ADHD treatment is not working, talk with your doctor about an anxiety disorder.

ADHD and Oppositional Defiant Disorder

Symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) include repeated temper tantrums, excessive arguing with adults, being uncooperative, deliberately annoying others, seeking revenge, being mean and spiteful. Research shows anywhere from 45 to 84 percent of children with ADHD will develop ODD. Treatment for ODD includes psychotherapy and medication.

ADHD and Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is characterized by mood swings—high, euphoric periods (mania) and low periods of depression. The mania stage is sometimes seen as hyperactivity and the low states as inattention and lack of motivation, all of which are common with ADHD. Those with bipolar may lose touch with reality or have a distorted sense of reality; their moods, both mania and depression, may last for weeks. About one-fifth of those with ADHD also have bipolar disorder.

ADHD and Sensory Processing Disorder

Sensory processing disorder (SPD) is an inability to sort out external stimuli—making the smallest stimuli unbearable—or the need to search out high-stimulus activities to arouse sluggish senses. When researchers looked at children who showed symptoms of ADHD or SPD, 40 percent showed symptoms of both. It is important that both conditions are identified and treated early.

ADHD and Autism

A new study suggests that kids with ADHD are 20 times more likely to exhibit some signs of autism compared with children without ADHD. As with ADHD, there isn't any laboratory test to diagnose autism. Because symptoms of both conditions overlap, diagnosing and separating the disorders can be difficult. Autism is characterized by social and communication difficulties and repetitive behaviors. Some early symptoms are delayed speech, avoiding eye contact, and not responding when their name is called. Early detection and treatment are important.

ADHD and Substance Abuse

Twenty to 30 percent of adults with ADHD go on to develop substance abuse problems at some point in their life. Some use drugs or alcohol to combat symptoms of ADHD—to sleep better or improve mood. People with substance abuse problems have a higher risk of depression and anxiety. Misusing drugs and alcohol makes treating ADHD more difficult.

ADHD and Tourette's Syndrome

Stimulant medication was previously thought to cause Tourette's syndrome in children with ADHD. Recent research has shown that both disorders have similar risk factors—smoking during pregnancy, being born prematurely, and low birth weight. Those with Tourette's exhibit motor and vocal tics—rapid, repetitive movements and sounds that range from mild to severe. About 90 percent of those with Tourette's syndrome also have another disorder, the most common being ADHD.

ADHD and Conduct Disorder

Between 25 and 45 percent of children with ADHD develop conduct disorder (CD). Characteristics of CD include fighting, cruelty toward others and animals, destructiveness, lying, stealing, truancy, and running away from home. Treatment for CD includes making sure ADHD symptoms are adequately treated, behavior therapy, and counseling. Your doctor may also suggest parental counseling to learn more productive ways of responding to your child's behaviors.

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