



**People
Working
Well**

Thriving With ADHD at Work

With Dr. Gurdeep Parhar



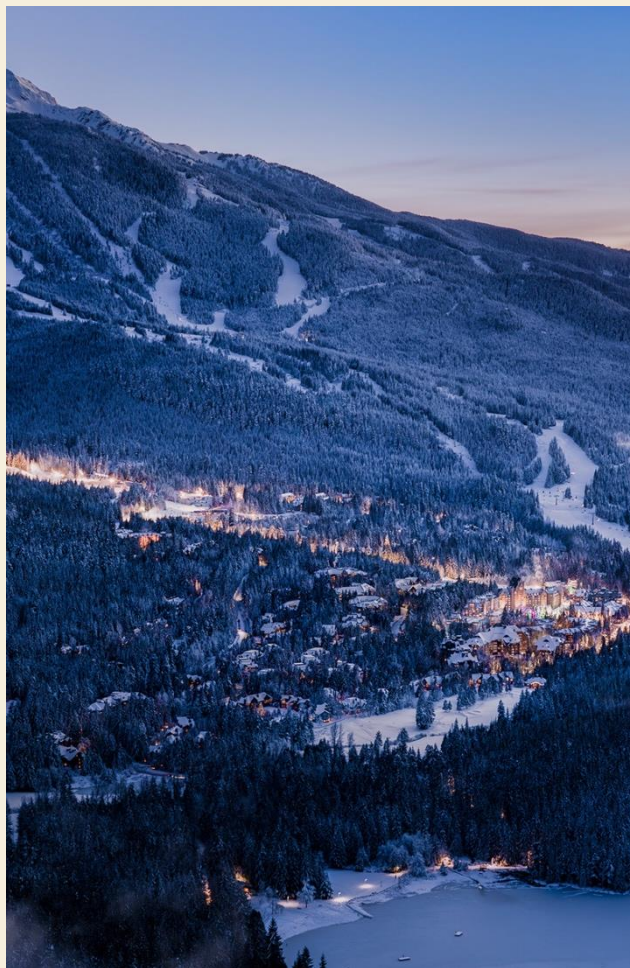
Speaker

Dr. Gurdeep Parhar, MD

*Co-Founder, Adult ADHD Centre
Clinical Professor, UBC Faculty of Medicine*

Dr. Parhar has been in family practice for over 30 years, and his clinical practice has focused on the health of patients with severe disabilities and ADHD. His teaching in undergraduate and postgraduate programs includes professionalism, equity, cultural safety, psychosocial aspects of healthcare, and medical disability.

Dr. Parhar is certified as an Occupational Medicine Physician and Disability Medicine Physician, focusing on optimizing workers' health/productivity and improving the success of individuals with differing abilities.



Land Acknowledgement

With respect and gratitude

We acknowledge with respect that this session takes place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of Indigenous Peoples.

We honour the enduring presence, knowledge, and contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

We recognize our shared responsibility to listen, learn, and move forward in the spirit of respect and reconciliation.



www.adhdcentreforwomen.com



www.adultadhdcentre.com



www.disabilityteam.ca



www.adultautismcentre.com



Disclosures

Presenter Disclosure

Presenter: Dr. Gurdeep Parhar

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- Grants/Research Support: Elvium, Takeda
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- Consulting Fees: Elvium, Takeda, Shire, Kye

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- Information/recommendations in the program are evidence-and/or guidelines-based, and data have been sourced from the evidence that is clinically accepted; opinions of the Speaker will be identified as such.
- This presentation is for educational purposes only and was developed by the speaker.
- No treatments-medication or non-medication should be initiated, modified or discontinued without the guidance of a healthcare professional.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- Define ADHD and neurodiversity
- Review some behaviours associated with ADHD
- Recognize how ADHD may manifest in the workplace
- Identify workplace strategies and approaches to support employees with ADHD
- Define a manager's role in building an inclusive workplace
- List some resources ADHD in the workplace

Under the Umbrella of Neurodiversity

- ADHD
- Autism
- Down Syndrome
- Dyscalculia (difficulty with math)
- Dysgraphia (difficulty with writing)
- Dyslexia
- Bipolar
- OCD
- Social anxiety
- and more...



Is neurodiversity a Disability?

- Many neurodivergent conditions are often classified as disabilities
- The focus on abilities does not negate the recognition of
 - A disability
 - Potential for functional dysfunction

Understanding Neurodiversity

- **Recognizes and celebrates the diversity of the human brain and mind**
 - 1998 Judy Singer, Australian sociologist
- **Views differences in behaviour and brain functioning as normal variations in a population**
- **Relies on a strengths-based concept**
- **Varying viewpoints within the neurodivergent community**
 - Some embrace neurodiversity as a source of strength
 - Others struggle with functional challenges
 - Some who are neurodivergent have medical conditions that need treatment
- **Some people who identify as neurodiverse do so as a source of empowerment**
- **Language related to neurodiversity makes a difference**
 - People who learn that it means they are different – not sick or defective, are more likely to be happier and aim higher in their careers

The Historical Continuum of ADHD

- Dispelling Notions of Novelty
- First described as abnormal inattention by Sir Alexander in the 1700s
- Referenced in nursery rhymes, like “Fidgety Phil”
- ADHD was officially identified and described in 1902 as a deficit in moral control
- Diagnostic criteria changed over time:
 - 1980: The condition was named ADD
 - 1987: Renamed ADHD



ADHD Changing Landscape, To Consider

- ADHD, formerly referred to as ADD
- Subcategorized as primarily inattentive, hyperactive, or combined
- Neurodevelopmental disorder that affects both children and adults
- Characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity
- Can impact various aspects of an individual's life
 - Academic
 - Work performance

“I practice a lot, but I have to practice twice as much to get half of as much” –Steven Sharp Nelson

- ADHD inhibited his attention span for long practice sessions
- He also began practicing on other instruments, including drums, guitar, and piano.
- Led to unique ways to play the cello:
 - Strumming, banging and plucking the strings much more aggressively
 - Only cellist who uses a kick drum
 - The Piano Guys on a quest to serenade all Seven Wonders of the World, have filmed 4 of the 7



ADHD Prevalence

- Adult ADHD Prevalence worldwide 5%
- As common as mood disorders (5.4%)
- One in 20 people living with ADHD (diagnosed/undiagnosed)
 - In an organization with 1,000 employees, that is 50 individuals



Biederman J. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2004;65:3-7; Fayyad J, et al. *Br J Psychiatry*. 2007;190:402-409; Ginsberg Y, et al. *Prim Care Companion CNS Disord*. 2014;16(3). Kessler RC, et al. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2006;163:716-723; Michelson D, et al. *Biol Psychiatry*. 2003;53:112-120; Polanczyk GV, et al. *Int J Epidemiol*. 2014;43:434-442. Wender PH, et al. *Ann NY Acad Sci*. 2001;931:1-16; Wilens TE, et al. *Annu Rev Med*. 2002;53:113-131.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/chronic-diseases/mental-illness/what-should-know-about-bipolar-disorder-manic-depression.html>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder-canadian-health-survey-children-youth-2019.html#a3.1>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/chronic-diseases/mental-illness/what-depression.html>

The Historical Continuum of ADHD

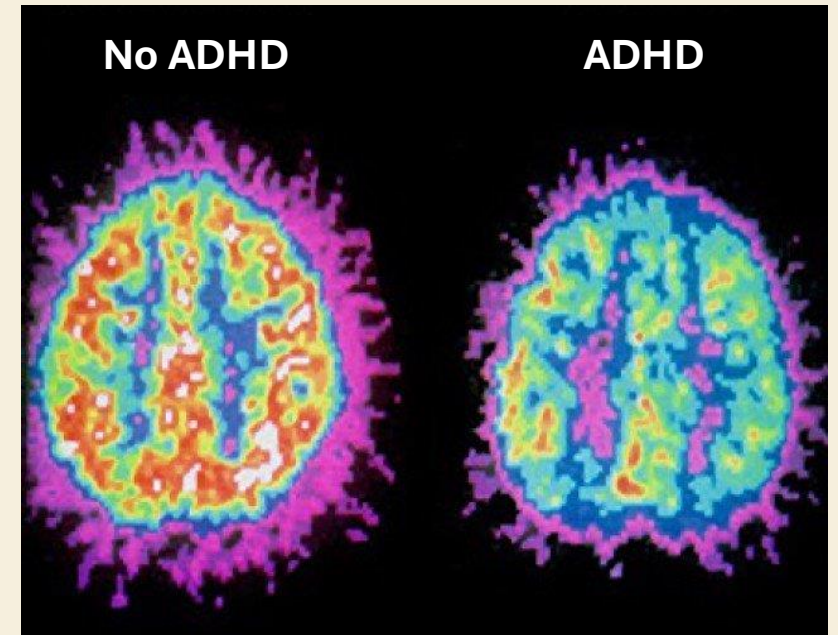
Recent Updates:

- ADHD is described as a neurodevelopmental disorder
- Adults and teenagers are included in the diagnosis
- For adults, the onset of symptoms occurs by age 12 (not 7)
- Previously referred to as subtypes, now referred to as presentations



ADHD is a Neurodevelopmental Condition

- **Differences in Brain Structure**
 - Smaller brains; reduced volume in various brain regions
 - Reduced cortical thickness
- **Differences in Brain Function**
 - Under-activation of networks associated with executive function and attention
 - Over-activation of networks associated with hyperactivity and impulsivity
- **Neurotransmitter Alterations**
 - Impairments in some neural pathways (e.g., dopamine and norepinephrine)



Cao M, et al. *Front Neuroanat.* 2016;10:25.
Cubillo A, et al. *Cortex.* 2012;48(2):194-215.
Friedman LA, Rapoport JL. *Curr Opin Neurobiol.* 2015;30:106-111.
Hoogman M, et al. *Lancet Psychiatry.* 2017;4(4):310-319.
Kasperek T, et al. *J Atten Disord.* 2015;19(11):931-943.
Tripp G, Wickens JR. *Neuropharmacology.* 2009;57(7-8):579-589.

ADHD Manifestations



Does not listen when spoken to directly



Distracted by extraneous stimuli



Difficulty following through on instructions or completing tasks



Fidgets



Impatient impulsive speeding



Difficulty sustaining focus, fails to give attention to detail or makes careless mistakes



Difficulty organizing tasks and activities



Overly active, unable to sit still for an extended period



Talks a lot, interrupts others, takes over

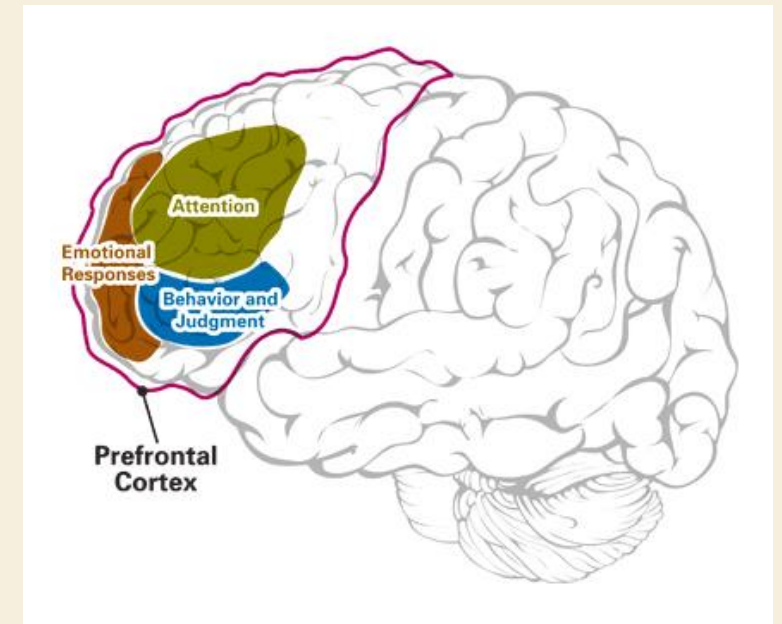


Forgetful in daily activities

Executive Function

ADHD interferes with the development of executive function in the frontal cortex.

- Judgment
- Analysis
- Problem-solving
- Critical thinking
- Forward thinking
- Personality expression
- Correct social behaviour
- Complex cognitive behaviours
- Working memory



Rubia K, et al. *Am J Psychiatry*.

2009;166(1):83-94.

Wolf RC, et al. *Hum Brain Mapp*.

2009;30(7):2252-2266.

GM: grey matter volume; WM: white matter volume; FCN: activity and functional connectivity; ↓: decreased volume (GM and WM columns) or activity (FCN column);

SMA = supplementary motor area.

Kasperek T et al. *J Att Dis*. 2015;19(11):931-43.

Executive Function: Brain's CEO

- Retrieves information and knowledge
- Analyzes past experiences and predicts consequences
- Organizes current tasks and files others for later

For people with ADHD

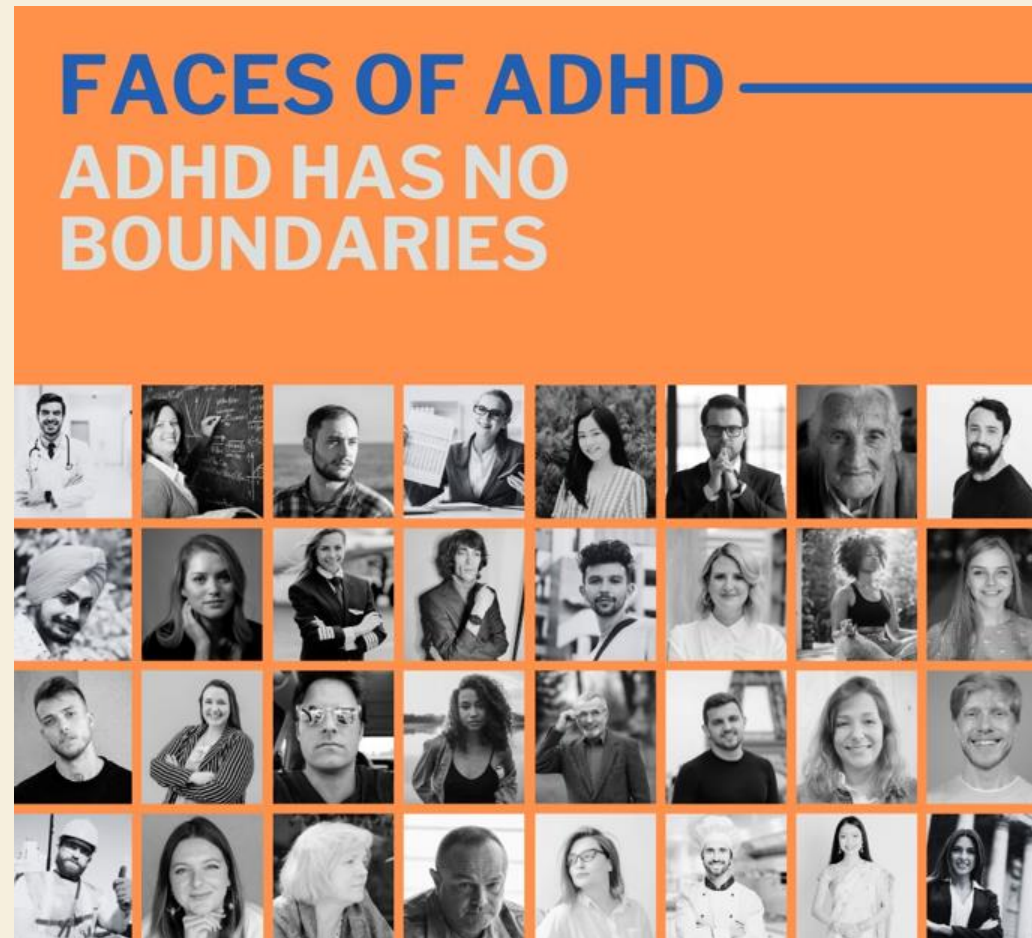
Executive function can be exhausting. It often requires frequent mental pauses and ongoing self-regulation.

Working memory

Working memory is part of executive function. It acts like the brain's GPS by guiding and directing actions. It is commonly weak in people with ADHD.

Faces of ADHD

- You can have several individuals with ADHD stand before you and they will each be unique in their experiences, successes, and challenges.
- No two individuals are alike.



Keep in Mind

Education for understanding and empathy

- Fosters understanding and empathy among diverse individuals

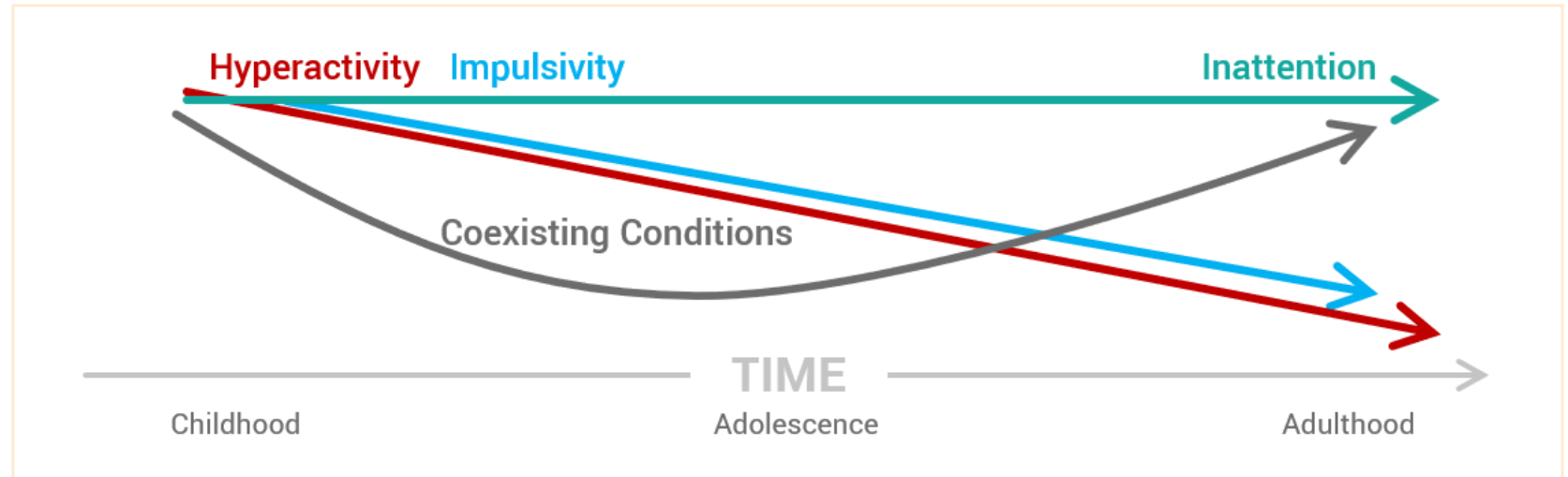
Respecting individual uniqueness

- Everyone is unique, common threads may exist, assumptions and comparisons should be avoided

Do not make or assume diagnosis or apply labels to others

- Nuance of humans whether neurodiverse or neurotypical
- Some individuals may identify with no formal diagnosis

ADHD Symptoms Across the Life Span

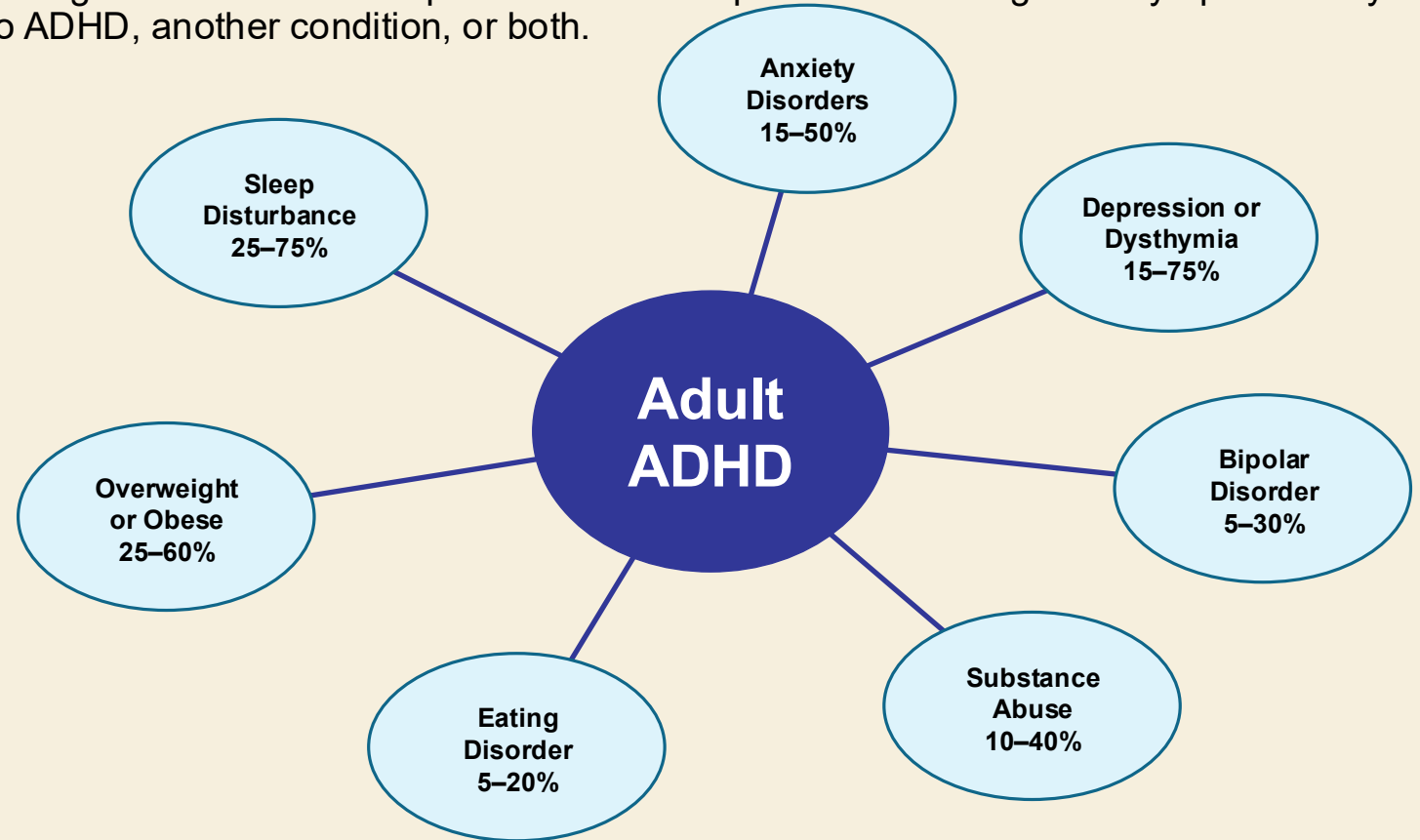


- As the demands for planning become greater in adulthood, issues associated with inattention became more prominent.
- Common complaints in adults with ADHD include:
 - Forgetfulness
 - Inability to organize or manage time
 - Procrastination
 - Insomnia

Based on data from 9380 subjects aged 7–29 years.
Adapted from: Ramtekkar UP et al. J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry. 2010;49(3):217–28.

ADHD Rarely Travels Alone: Co-occurring Conditions

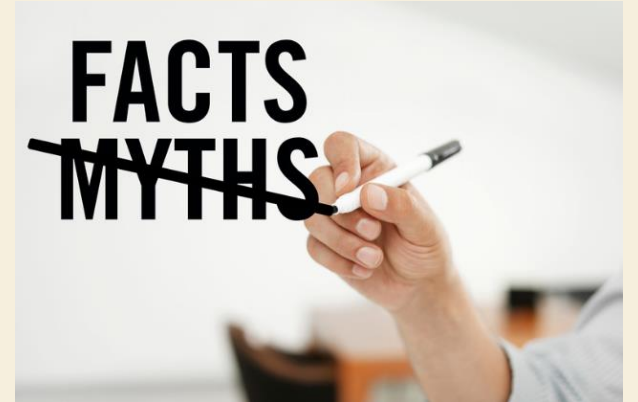
Co-occurring conditions can complicate the clinical presentation. Cognitive symptoms may be linked to ADHD, another condition, or both.



About 75–85% of adults with ADHD meet criteria for a comorbid condition. Ranges reported across studies.

Dealing with Misconceptions

- Do not assume people with ADHD are:
 - Unorganized
 - Unintelligent
 - Lazy
- The following remarks are inappropriate:
 - Everyone has a little bit of ADHD
 - I had an “ADHD moment”
 - You are too smart/successful to have ADHD
- Questioning if ADHD is a real diagnosis or over-diagnosed.
- Minimization: Attributing challenges to a lack of effort or a character trait.
- Stereotyping all ADHD individuals as hyperactive, disorganized, or unintelligent
- Expressing impatience with individuals who take longer to complete tasks without recognizing the neurological basis of their challenges.



Reframing ADHD

- ADHD is more than attention challenges
 - Disorder of self-regulation and executive function
 - Exacerbated by weak memory function
- Not a deficit of attention but an abundance of attention; The challenge is controlling it
 - Variable attention
 - Individuals can hyperfocus or cannot focus
- Ongoing discussions around renaming ADHD to better reflect the nature of the condition and reduce stigma
- Opinions may vary and will likely change in the future



Varied Expressions of ADHD

Executive Function

May affect planning, organizing, prioritizing, estimating time, and managing several responsibilities at once.

Dysregulation

May show up as feeling overwhelmed, reacting strongly to feedback, withdrawing after conflict, or taking longer to regain calm.

Self-Regulation

May affect how someone pauses, responds, and manages emotions during stressful or frustrating moments.

Sensory Processing

Sound, light, movement, or visual stimulation may create distraction or distress in the workplace.

These examples can look different from person to person. Avoid assumptions and ask what support is helpful.

Varied Expressions of ADHD (Continued)

Time Blindness

May include underestimating task time, running late, missing timelines, or losing track of time when focused.

Working Memory

May include forgetting verbal instructions, losing track of multi-step tasks, or needing written reminders.

Rejection Sensitivity

Feedback or performance reviews may feel more intense and can increase anxiety or avoidance.

Justice Sensitivity

May include noticing inconsistent rules, unfair processes, uneven recognition, or small inequities others miss.

Support starts with curiosity, clarity, and practical adjustments that fit the role.

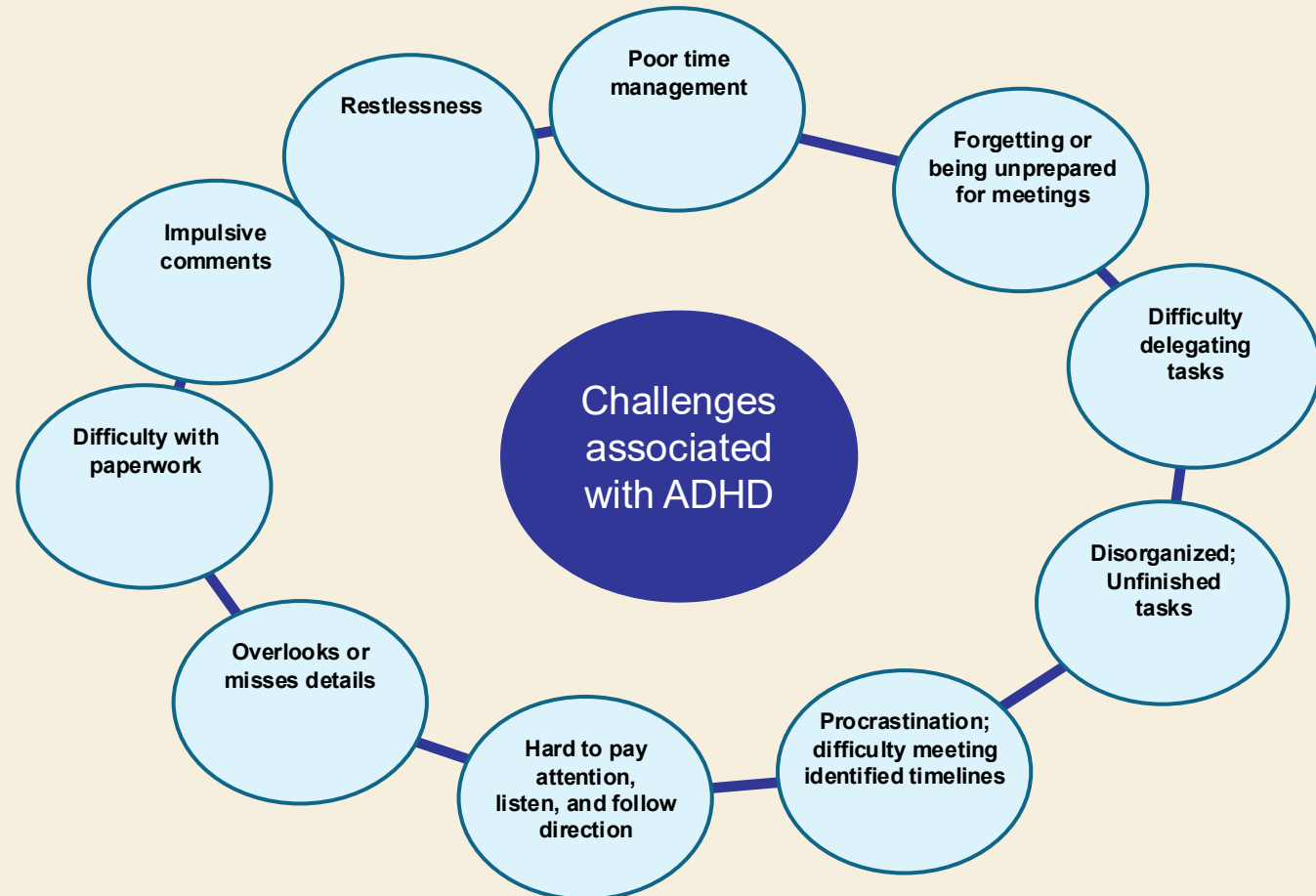
The Impact for Individuals

- ADHD is a risk factor for unemployment and underemployment
- Individuals with ADHD:
 - Are less likely to be employed full-time
 - Earn less than their peers without ADHD
 - Have increased risk of job dismissal
 - Impulsively quit their jobs (frequent job changes)
 - Have poor relationships with employers/colleagues

**\$6–11
billion**

Estimated annual cost to
Canadians through loss of
workplace productivity

How ADHD May Present at Work



Workplace Benefits of Neurodiversity & ADHD

- Innovation
- Diversity of thought
- Problem-solving
- Enhanced team dynamics
- Increased productivity
- Workforce retention
- Organizational accountability and community impact

Neurodiverse individuals are estimated to make up 20% of the global population

ADHD makes up 5%



Benefits of Inclusion

Broader perspectives

A wider range of backgrounds, cultures, genders, abilities, and lived experiences.

Creativity and problem-solving

Diversity can bring different ways of seeing issues and developing solutions.

Respect and belonging

Inclusive workplaces value people's differences and reduce stigma.

Equitable opportunities

Employees have a fair chance to contribute, grow, and succeed.

Inclusion is not only about access. It is also about creating conditions where people can do their best work.

Benefits of Making Adjustments & Accommodations

- Innovative best practices for all employees
- Better job retention, lower turnover
- Diversity in thinking
- Enhanced job performance and work quality
- Better safety records
- Broader talent pool

Accommodations tailored to harness the strengths of neurodivergent individuals benefit all individuals within the organization.

Employee Disclosure

Influences on employees choosing to disclose:

- Is it relevant to what the individual is doing; role change
- Status of condition has changed
- Past experiences
- Environment; organizational culture, leadership
- Identified a need for adjustment/accommodation
- Work goals



Types of employee disclosure:

- **Full voluntary disclosure** reveals health conditions to everyone
- **Selective disclosure** control what, and how much information to share and to limited people
- **Forced disclosure** no choice but to disclose such as flare up, lack of access
- **Concealment** strategies to hide disability

ADHD at Work: To Disclose or Not to Disclose?

Reasons Not To

- Fear of discrimination
- Privacy concerns
- Stigma
- Perceived unimportance
- Past negative experience

Reasons To

- Setting yourself up for success
- Accommodations
- Team collaboration
- Self-advocacy
- Part of your identity

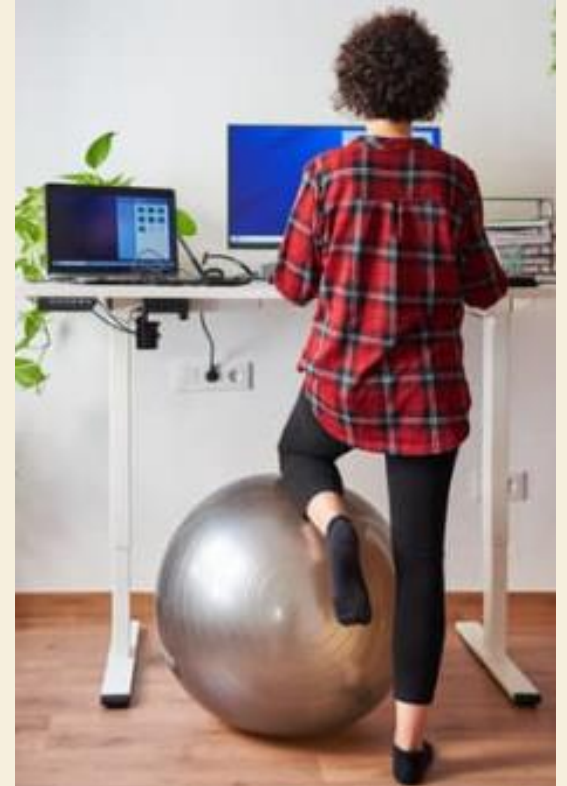
Key message

The decision is entirely personal and depends on the individual's circumstances, workplace culture, and the nature of the disability.

Benefits of Accommodating

- Innovative best practices for all employees
- Better job retention, lower turnover
- Diversity in thinking
- Enhanced job performance and work quality
- Better safety records
- Broader talent pool

Accommodations tailored to harness the strengths of neurodivergent individuals **benefit all individuals** within the organization.



Supporting Individuals

- What are the specific challenges your employee is having?
- Do they have any suggestions for adjustments and/or accommodations?
- Are there any relevant current programs that your employee can access? (Training, minor adjustment implementations, etc.)
- If not, then identify the next steps and process:
 - Do you need to involve the disability management team or another designated department/team member?

Supporting Individuals (*Continued*)

Self Adjustments:

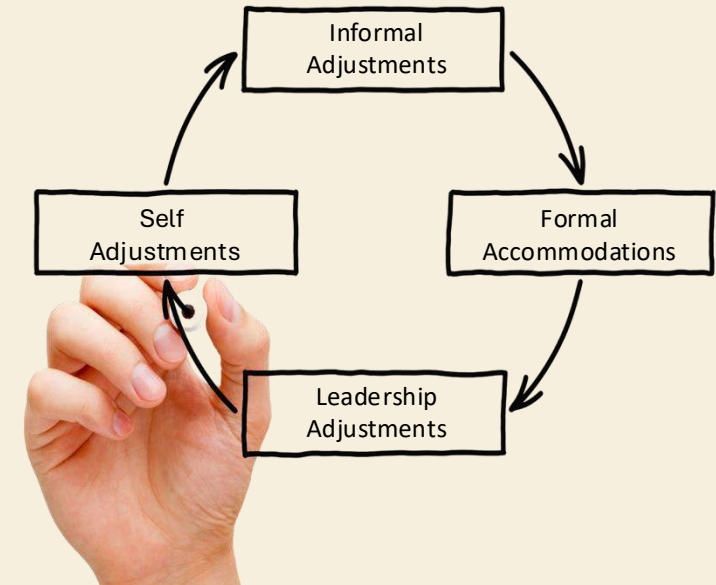
- Employees may do so unknowingly or knowingly (masking)

Adjustments (informal):

- Should be documented for record of adjustment
- Changes that are within the power of the manager to make
- Examples: Desk location, headphones, light shades, breaks, task allocation

Accommodations (formal):

- Process through Disability Management Team
- Requires medical documentation



Effective Adjustment & Accommodation Strategies

Your employees know themselves best. Start by opening space for them to share their needs and preferred adjustments.

Ask about specific challenges

- “How are you finding ____?”
- “Are you running into any challenges or barriers?”

Ask for their input

- “What support or adjustments can we make ____ easier or more accessible?”

Offer existing options

- “____ offers ____.”
- “Would this be helpful for you?”

Connect to additional support

- If more support or accommodations are needed, connect with Disability Management or the appropriate contact.

These are general examples. Confirm available strategies within organizational policies/guidelines.

Navigating Common Challenges

Examples of tools or adjustments. Confirm options within organizational policies/guidelines and the requirements of each role.

Time Management Challenges

- Allow time blocking
- Use visual reminders or alarms
- Set supportive goals
- Assign a mentor
- Provide body doubling stations

Organization & Planning Challenges

- Provide planners or digital calendars
- Offer coaching or mentorship
- Encourage checklists or visual aids

Distractibility Challenges

- Provide noise-cancelling headphones
- Designate quiet zones
- Consider desk placement when possible
- Offer flexible work arrangements when role allows
- Ask how employees prefer to receive information

Flexibility should be framed carefully: adjustments depend on job function, structure, and available organizational options.

Navigating Common Challenges (Continued)

These are general examples of tools or adjustments. Confirm appropriate strategies based on organizational policies/guidelines.

Meeting Challenges

- Distribute agendas in advance
- Hold shorter, focused meetings
- Build in breaks or sit/stand options

Impulsivity Challenges

- Encourage pausing and thinking
- Value time to consider decisions
- Offer self-awareness supports where appropriate

Task Completion Challenges

- Offer frequent breaks
- Break tasks into realistic goals
- Recognize and reward progress

Not every adjustment is possible in every role. The goal is to explore workable supports that fit the person and the work.

Inclusive Hiring

- Provide a clear description of what the interview will entail.
- Share interview questions beforehand when possible.
- Clearly outline the structure, timing, and expectations.
- Use clear, concise questions and allow time to respond.
- Consider work samples or a working interview when appropriate.
- Avoid judging skills that are not required for the role.

Goal: reduce unnecessary pressure while still assessing the skills needed for the position.

Implementing Adjustments & Accommodations

Create a process with both structure and flexibility:

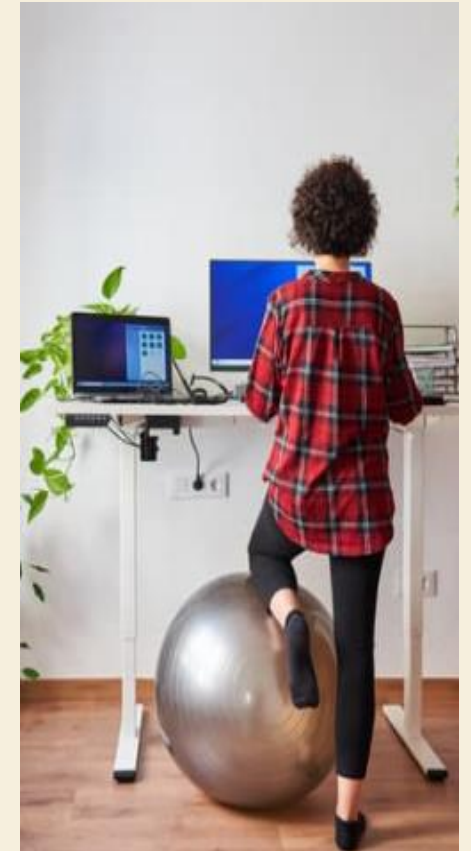
- Personal assessment to identify specific needs
- Involve those supporting and implementing accommodations in establishing, adapting, and reviewing supports
- Open communication for expressing needs and evaluating supports

Adjustment process

- Adjustments can range from simple changes to a formal process.
- Monitor effectiveness and make changes if needed.
- Schedule a review of the accommodation plan.

Embracing Neurodiversity in the Workplace

- Explored an understanding of ADHD in the workplace and the broader concept of neurodiversity.
- Uncovered how ADHD challenges may present in the workplace and the underlying causes.
- Dismantled stigmas and fostered understanding.
- Fostered inclusivity & recognized strengths:
 - Creativity, hyperfocus, and innovative thinking
 - Contributing to a dynamic and resilient workforce
- Practiced supporting adjustments and accommodations:
 - Addressing specific needs for equal opportunities
- Building a foundation for individual and organizational success.
- Every employee contributing unique talents for collective achievement.



Key Takeaways

In this session, we explored how to:

- ✓ Define ADHD and neurodiversity
- ✓ Review some behaviours associated with ADHD
- ✓ Recognize how ADHD may manifest in the workplace
- ✓ Identify workplace strategies and approaches to support employees with ADHD
- ✓ Define a manager's role in building an inclusive workplace
- ✓ List some resources ADHD in the workplace

Thank you!

Scan the QR code for resources and more information.



Adult ADHD Centre resources