

Increase in ADHD Diagnoses in the US

New research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that one in five high school boys and 11% of the entire US student population have been diagnosed with ADHD. This highlights a growing fear that children in America are over-diagnosed with ADHD. Within the past decade, medical diagnoses of ADHD have increased by 53%. As of this year, over 6.4 million children aged 4-17 have been diagnosed with ADHD at some point in their lives. About two-thirds of children diagnosed take stimulant medication, such as Ritalin or Adderall, which can rein in a child's excess energy, but can also lead to muscle tics, aggression, high blood pressure, addiction, anxiety, insomnia, and even psychosis.

Broadening the ADHD Diagnosis

Some parents and doctors have praised the increasing rates of diagnosis, believing that this rising numbers represent a greater tolerance and acknowledgement of the disorder. However, diagnosis is a subjective process, relying on patient meetings and discussions with teachers and parents. ADHD is estimated to exist in 3-7% of the population, so the fact that 11% are given the diagnosis points to not only over-diagnosis, but overuse of ADHD treatment medication. Regardless, the American Psychiatric Association plans to broaden the definition of the disorder in the near future to extend the diagnosis and treatment to even more children. Although specific changes have not yet been finalized, highlights include raising the cut-off age for qualifying symptoms from 7 to 12, and behaviors like repeatedly losing cell phones and becoming distracted while filling out paperwork will become indicative of the disorder.

The Push for Diagnosis

Causes for overuse of the prescription may result from a doctor's learning of symptoms of inattention and jumping to an ADHD diagnosis. Parents are sometimes swayed by the advertising promises of pharmaceuticals that claim to improve their child's lives and insist on treatment. Parents may also pressure physicians to give them a solution for their child's poor behavior or failing grades. Because the drugs are shown to vastly improve focus and concentration, they are viewed by some as a fast track to good grades, which is a danger for competitive students or competitive environments. Some studies have even said that 30% of a child's pills are shared with or sold to friends.

Classroom Impact on ADHD

Many diagnoses for ADHD have resulted from changes to classroom structure. Even young children are required to sit still for longer, and teaching styles are becoming increasingly language-based, an area that is slow to develop in the male brain. These shifting practices have made it difficult for many boys to keep pace with the other children, and patterns of poor performance may well follow these students throughout high school and into college (if they still want to go to college). Instead of re-examining the appropriateness of the curriculum, boys are often diagnosed with ADHD or other learning disabilities, and they are given prescription medicine to curb their energy and make them focus.

Education has been part of the problem, but it is also part of the solution. [Programs for boys with learning disorders](#) understand the struggles that male students have in standard educational systems

and adjust classes to suit the needs of each student. Through structure and a student-centered approach to education, students naturally improve concentration and become engaged, motivated learners.