Dear Alice,

I think I might have attention deficit disorder. Does it make sense to get an evaluation? Could I do it on campus?

? distracted

Answer

Dear distracted,

First things first: if you're ever concerned about your mental or physical health? it absolutely makes sense to seek out more information or get evaluated by a health care professional! And, many college and university campuses offer testing at their counseling centers. That said, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can be a bit tricky for mental health care providers to diagnose in adults. Why you ask? Because the symptoms in adults might be different or more subtle than symptoms in children, and because folks with ADHD often have other mental health diagnoses (such as depression or anxiety). But, fear not! Regardless of receiving an ADHD diagnosis or not, connecting with a mental health professional might open up doors to services, such as counseling or academic support, if you're experiencing symptoms that you find troubling.
As you decide whether to be formally evaluated for ADHD, it might be helpful to learn a bit more about the symptoms and the process of diagnosis. Generally, those with ADHD have average to above-average intelligence and possess special talents and abilities, like boundless energy and creative problem solving. However, they also often have trouble focusing, become easily frustrated, or may feel constantly disorganized, which can understandably affect a student's academic and personal life. In order to determine whether what you're experiencing is due to ADHD (and not something else), a mental health professional will take multiple facets of your life and experiences into consideration. More specifically, ADHD is a condition that develops in childhood. That being the case, s/he might also look at your past school records, interview family or friends about your childhood behavior, or ask about your mental health history. All of this is meant to get a sense of whether symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity existed in your childhood years. While understanding your childhood history of ADHD symptoms would be useful to inform your provider's diagnosis, s/he would probably also evaluate you for current symptoms of ADHD (now that you're an adult), including whether you're experiencing:

- Trouble focusing or concentrating
- Restlessness
- Impulsivity
- Difficulty completing tasks
- Disorganization
- Low frustration tolerance
- Frequent mood swings
- Hot temper
- Trouble coping with stress
- Unstable relationships

An assessment for ADHD would likely include multiple types of tests and measures of attention, memory, general intelligence, performance, and social functioning. Your provider may complete a full physical and mental health exam to rule out other possible causes of symptoms, like brain injury, thyroid conditions, hypoglycemia [3] (low blood sugar), depression, learning disabilities, anxiety, and other mental illnesses [4].

If you decide you would indeed like to be evaluated for symptoms, the good news is that the health centers at many colleges and universities are familiar with ADHD in college students. They may provide testing on-site or refer you off-campus to an appropriate source familiar with ADHD. If after an assessment, you do get a diagnosis of ADHD, it might take some time to let the news soak in. Fortunately, there are a number of treatment options and assistance out there that have been successful for college students and adults, such as:

- Behavioral skills training (e.g., learning new organizational and planning skills or improving social skills [5])
- Medications to manage your symptoms, including Ritalin and Adderall
- Classroom accommodations (e.g., extra time on tests, private testing conditions, note-takers, etc.)
- Support groups or social support services for students on your campus or in your area with ADHD

While seeking help can feel awkward or scary, you might find comfort in getting some answers about bothersome symptoms that you've been noticing. Kudos to you for reaching
out and wanting to learn more!

Alice!
Category:
Emotional Health [6]
Miscellaneous [7]

Related questions
Adderall, alcohol, and alternative treatments for ADHD [8]
Do I have a learning disability? [9]
Do I have dyslexia? [10]
Types of therapists [11]
Social difficulties: Cultural differences or Asperger's syndrome? [12]

Resources
Medical Services (Morningside) [13]
Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [14]
Medical Services (CUMC) [15]
Mental Health Service (CUMC) [16]
Disability Services [17]

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