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Parenting Part II: Teens can be diagnosed with ADHD too



Call it "the homework sign." Ari Tuckman, a psychologist in West Chester, Pa., says he knows the teenager in his office probably has attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) if he hears this: The teen does his homework — but often forgets to turn it in.



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Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

A teen's view

Nicole Snyder, 17, got pretty good grades as a young student. But by 10th grade, she was struggling."I got used to not doing well on tests," says the high school senior from Elkridge, Md. "I lost my confidence."

While not wildly hyperactive, "in class, I was always changing positions and I couldn't stay focused. And reading was a big problem. Physically, I was reading, but an hour later, I had no idea what I read."

When her younger brother was diagnosed with ADHD, she and her parents wondered: Did she have the same problem? After "a bunch of testing," a doctor agreed that she did. He prescribed a medication to help her These kids also have textbook symptoms of ADHD, including inattentiveness and easy distractibility. But they've made it through early childhood without detection, Tuckman says, usually because they do not have the type of ADHD that involves running around and creating havoc.

"The hyperactive kids make themselves known," he says. "The inattentive ones fly under the radar."

But both sorts, studies show, are at risk for problems ranging from car crashes to dropping out of school.

Tuckman and other specialists hope new guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics will help pediatricians spot more of these teens. The guidelines say doctors should follow up on suspicious signs in kids ages 4 to 18. Previous versions covered kids 6-12; the change reflects new studies on diagnosis and treatment of younger and older kids, says lead author Mark Wolraich, a professor of pediatrics at the University of

Teens (and some preschoolers) were getting diagnosed before these guidelines. But if more affected teens now get timely help, that will be a good thing, some parents say.

"It's been a long road," says Clara McCall, 39, of Apex, N.C., who has a 15-year-old daughter just diagnosed with ADHD, after many visits to doctors and psychologists. Now, she says, the family is trying to help the bright 10th grader get back on track after "she almost failed 9th grade."

Robin Snyder, 43, of Elkridge, Md., says her daughter Nicole, 17, is thriving in school since starting medication

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focus. Now, "I'm much more engaged, and I'm enjoying my classes." Her grades are up, too. for ADHD in the spring. But "if we had known this a lot sooner, she would have benefited."

Not every struggling high-schooler has ADHD. Even when some signs are there, the new guidelines say

pediatricians should look for other explanations — including substance abuse, anxiety and depression. Doctors also should watch for healthy teens seeking stimulant drugs to get an academic edge, Wolraich says.

Teens who have ADHD often don't ask for help. So parents should ask a doctor's advice if they see signs including "consistent patterns of forgetfulness, misplacing things, poor follow-through, rushing through homework and procrastinating to the last minute," says David Goodman, a psychiatrist and assistant professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore.

Diagnosed teens should try medication and may benefit from behavioral therapies, the pediatricians' group says.

Parents can help:

•Create consistent routines. Help your teen make and stick to routines for sleeping, studying and eating. Encourage them to set up their own electronic schedules and automated reminders, Goodman suggests.

•Be extra-vigilant about driving. "Set the rules, monitor the rules and enforce the rules," says Gregory Fabiano, a psychologist at the University at Buffalo, N.Y. He leads a pilot program in which parents and teens with ADHD agree to strict rules on speeding, cell-phones and more. Parents then monitor teens through in-car devices and teens use driving simulators to sharpen skills.

• Warn teens not to sell or share medications. Tell them it "is a federal offense and can have serious consequences," Wolraich says. And when teens move to college or elsewhere, make sure they know how to store drugs securely, to prevent theft.

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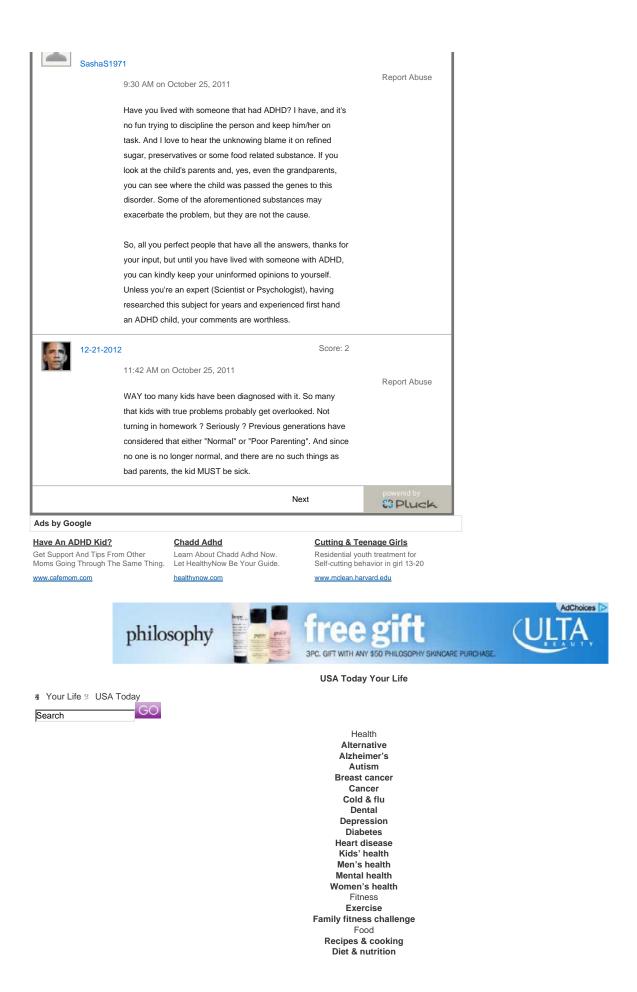
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