



ADHD Across the Life Span

A Review of

Nonmedication Treatments for Adult ADHD: Evaluating Impact on Daily Functioning and Well-Being

by J. Russell Ramsay

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Reviewed by

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In an age when the focus of psychological treatment has become pharmacological, with patients being rushed to take pills rather than engage in talk therapy, *Nonmedication Treatments for Adult ADHD: Evaluating Impact on Daily Functioning and Well-Being* is a much-needed resource for practitioners seeking to understand all available options. This interesting and provocative book addresses the fate of adults who suffer from a disorder frequently thought of as a childhood condition. In these thoughtful and well-written chapters, J. Russell Ramsay presents a discussion of several different approaches to treating adults with ADHD, followed by a wonderful summary of the strengths, limitations, and possible future directions of the available psychosocial treatments.

Ramsay begins with a comprehensive review of the current status of nonmedication interventions for adults with ADHD and then proceeds to review and evaluate the wide range of treatment options available. He recognizes the necessity for medication when appropriate but then proceeds to introduce the concept that adequate treatment requires more than mere symptom reduction. Although he acknowledges that symptom relief is provided by medication and that pharmacotherapy, when appropriate, provides a foundation for the treatment of ADHD in patients of all ages, he points out that the adult patient is as concerned with fulfilling personal roles and performing tasks as with symptom reduction alone.

Left untreated, ADHD may thwart the individual's ability to handle the common demands of daily life and to pursue reasonable goals. ADHD is a pernicious syndrome that corrodes one's sense of confidence in managing many essential domains of life, such as work, school, and relationships; it impairs confidence, industriousness, connection with others, and a sense of self.

Nonmedication Treatments for Adult ADHD illuminates the negative effects of untreated ADHD by pointing out the cumulative and corrosive psychological effects of living with the disorder. ADHD impairs functioning in most, if not all, activities of adult life and results in a heightened sense of hopelessness, self-denigration, shame, and pessimism. According to Ramsay, "Adults with ADHD often struggle with some form of isolation or a sense of not fitting in, and either have lost social connections as a downstream consequence of dropping out of school, repeated job changes, or are having difficulty maintaining relationships" (p. 92).

The author points out that an accurate diagnosis of ADHD can help the patient understand that his or her symptoms are not the result of a character flaw; this interpretation itself is a significant intervention. Ramsay

highlights the importance of the therapeutic alliance, stressed in the ADHD treatment literature. Common difficulties of clients, such as being late to appointments, forgetting to do therapeutic homework, or not following up on tasks, can be used by the therapist as opportunities to promote improvement rather than being seen as evidence of resistance.

Ramsay presents psychosocial treatments for adult ADHD that include individual treatments, group treatments, self-directed treatments, and coaching; for each, he describes strengths, limitations, and possible future directions. Additionally, the strengths and weaknesses of family therapy, marital therapy, social skill training, neurofeedback, and cognitive training are illuminated.

Techniques that work for nonimpaired individuals, such as watching appropriate behavior that is being modeled by others, do not usually work with the adult with ADHD. But individual psychosocial treatment can help adults with ADHD in their interpersonal relationships. Specific social skill training is helpful, and helping people identify appropriate social interaction reduces embarrassment and allows the adult with ADHD to interact more comfortably. The book presents interventions that target common sources of family discord such as noise, conflict, disorganization, and stress, aiming to set up the home environment to promote positive coping skills and minimize disruption. Treatments available to assist the individual, spouse, and family are explained in detail.

Ramsay discusses strategies for treating college students with ADHD, recommending accommodations of extended time on tests, assistance from note-taking services, and recorded lectures. Compensation strategies for the workplace are also suggested.

Nonmedication Treatments for Adult ADHD ends with an excellent overview of resources, including a summary of nonmedication treatments for adult attention deficit disorder, a list of currently used medications (on and off label), and an extensive bibliography of references.

This book is comprehensive and timely, given the increasing level of interest in adult ADHD. It is well organized, carefully researched, and highly readable. Considering the prevalence of adult ADHD, medical and mental health professionals are likely to encounter it in the course of standard clinical practice (p. 174). The coming decade will likely be an important one for the study of nonmedication treatments for adult ADHD (p. 175).

Nonmedication Treatments for Adult ADHD is a useful resource for both therapists and patients as they explore the many options available to them for treatment of this most complex disorder. This book is suitable for psychologists, counselors, and all professionals involved in working with adults with ADHD.

Footnotes

Note. Special thanks to Heather Berigan in helping prepare this review.