

ADHD & Misinformation: Accurate Information is More Helpful

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My Biases & Agenda

- I want to promote CHADD's content over others'
 - Serve as the co-chair of the conference (volunteer)
- I have written books and sometimes get paid to present
- I have a psychology practice
- I feel a moral calling to protect people from bad information

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It Cuts Both Ways

- The increase in awareness and decrease in stigma about ADHD is great
 - More people are seeking and getting good information
- And also inaccurate information isn't helpful—even if well intended
 - May (just) be a waste of time—but there is a cost in delaying effective strategies and treatments
 - May be harmful

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Evidence-Based Information

- Is based in existing specific and related knowledge bases
- Is supported by scientific research
 - The gold standard uses placebos and randomized controls
- Has been peer reviewed and repeated by others
 - Without a financial or other stake in the results

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Research Tells Us How Likely It Is to Help

- Research tells us about group averages
 - Or for subgroups (hopefully)—kids vs adults; ADHD plus anxiety
 - Potential benefits and also risks and side effects
- Obviously, you are not a group average
 - But still, let's start with what is most likely to work
- Unfortunately, research can lag practice
 - And people want a better life in the meantime

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Consider the Source

- What do they have to gain?
 - From your attention/clicks?
 - From you consuming this information? What's their agenda?
 - From your dollars?
- Are they transparent about why they do what they do?
 - Or say what they say?
- Where does their information come from?

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Gotta Feed the Beast

- Content creators have constant pressure to generate new posts
 - That are exciting enough to generate more clicks—and money, attention, relevance, etc.
 - That generate urgency, optimism, anxiety, doubt. . .
 - Because the standard known advice isn't sexy
- This pressure creates a clear preference towards certain types of content

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Yes, That Is Too Good to Be True

- Big promises require big evidence
 - Do they explain what their promises are based on?
 - Do they offer evidence that goes beyond their word or testimonials?
- The basic smell test
 - What are the odds that this person discovered something big that no one else did?

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The Red Flags

- Automatically questionable language
 - Revolutionary, transformative, miracle, life changing, instantly, amazing. . .
- Doubts institutions and common knowledge
 - "They don't want you to know. . ."
- Offers extreme cases—good or bad

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WHAT CAUSES ADHD?

This is where it begins

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What Is Known to Cause ADHD?

- ADHD is mostly determined by genetics
 - Several dozen genes each have a possible small contribution—mostly related to dopamine receptors
- Anything that impacts brain development can also have an impact
 - In utero, during birth, in early years
- Mostly involves activity in the prefrontal cortex

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What Doesn't Cause ADHD?

- Bad parenting
- Food or additives
- Too much screen time
- Trauma
- Brain imbalance
- Vision issues
- Maybe the causality goes the other way?

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The correct cause guides the most effective interventions.

For ADHD and everything else.

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TREATMENT, STRATEGIES & INTERVENTIONS

This is what we do about it

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Personal Experiences Are Validating

- Hearing others' experiences can be incredibly validating
 - De-stigmatizes and promotes acceptance
 - Gives perspective and aids understanding of one's experience
 - Reduces feelings of being alone
- These may not change the ADHD itself, but they can change how you feel about it
 - Which can be just as important

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Individual Results May Vary

- Figuring everything out yourself takes too long
 - And you may never get there
- Getting strategies from others is really helpful
 - Especially if you feel like someone offers advice that tends to help
- But even proven interventions won't work for everyone
 - We tend to give others' experiences too much weight in our decision making

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What's the Evidence?

- Basic theory is inconsistent with existing knowledge → the intervention can't be effective
- Consistent with existing knowledge but has not yet been sufficiently studied → wait and see
- Sufficient solid research has been completed → likely true
 - Poorly designed research tells us nothing

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Research Matters

- Personal experience isn't proof
 - Will it generalize to other people and situations?
 - We all have invisible biases
 - We weight experiences that support our initial beliefs
- Research combines many experiences and reduces biases
 - But can't eliminate them
 - Statistics let us know if there might really be something here

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Just Because

- Just because something affects
 - Attention, focus, persistence, etc.
 - Motivation, procrastination, etc.
- . . . Doesn't mean it affects ADHD
- Or maybe it's addressing a co-occurring condition
 - E.g., treating trauma improves some aspects of attention

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Some Interventions Benefit Everyone

- Many interventions benefit all people—but aren't ADHD interventions
 - Sleep, healthy diet, exercise, mindfulness
- Novelty is always great
 - At first. . .
- Placebos can be quite effective
 - At first. . .

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THE TAKE AWAYS

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Do Your Part

- Don't reward click bait
- Feed your algorithm well
- Amplify good content
 - With your clicks
 - With your shares—explain to others why it's good
- Ask trusted sources for recommendations

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It's All About Decision-Making

- Good information guides good decisions
- Good practitioners/information sources share their knowledge
 - You benefit from their education and experience
 - Hopefully you trust their opinion
- But it's your life, so you are still the one to decide

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