



## ADD AND ANXIETY

Unrecognised and undiagnosed Attention Deficit Disorder, ADD, is one of the commonest causes of chronic lifelong anxiety. This is especially common in teenage girls with ADD and their mothers. \*

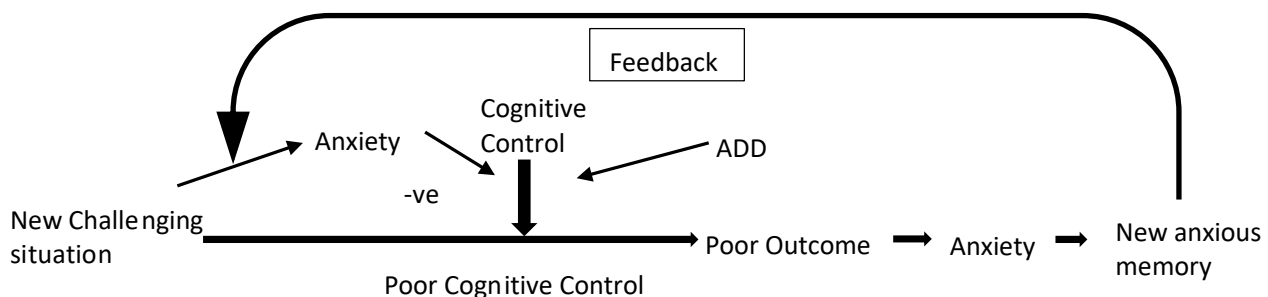
ADD results from the persistent dysfunction and inactivation of the prefrontal cortex, the “thinking” part. Executive and cognitive functions rely on good working memory. The ability to plan, be organised and have insight. Your functioning cognitive ability determines success in life and resilience to setbacks. Working memory is exquisitely sensitive to the noradrenaline level in the prefrontal cortex. Too little results in ADD, too much causes ADHD. Having the right amount is crucial to clear thinking. When these cognitive functions are impaired, it is commonly expressed as having foggy thinking, an inability to think clearly, everything is all too hard or being constantly overwhelmed when confronted with problems. When faced with having to decide, it is too difficult.

Being unable to think clearly and decisively when confronted with problems often results in the person becoming anxious. Anxiety is the brain being activated to deal with a situation when it is perceived as stressful, difficult, threatening, or dangerous. Initially the stress reaction results in improved cognition, however when anxiety is too high it rapidly impairs cognitive/insightful thinking. The classic example is stage fright, when the person is unable to think and loses their ability to function. Even small amounts of anxiety will impair cognition. The person then relies on past responses without thinking through the issues to then make the best decision. Poor cognitive control results in suboptimal behaviour resulting in further difficulties.

A feedback loop is established, a poor decision due to impaired cognition leads to a poor outcome which creates a memory with associated anxiety of what caused the poor outcome. When a similar situation presents again it will result in immediate anxiety, poor executive function and another poor or worse outcome.

ADHD medications activate the prefrontal cortex, resulting in improved cognitive/thinking abilities. The person then makes better decisions. Poor prefrontal/ cognitive activation is like being partially blind and trying to navigate an obstacle course. With every trip and blunder, anxiety is increased. If vision is restored, it becomes easier. The anxiety of navigation disappears. With prefrontal/ cognitive activation sufferers become better able to deal with everyday problems. **They are then in control.** They become resilient because they make decisions that improve their situation.

ADHD is the opposite of ADD, ADHD is when there is too much arousal, but this also results in impaired cognitive control. This lack of control results in impulsive and often detrimental behaviours. ADD and ADHD are impairments of prefrontal cortex activation and cognitive control of behaviour. The result is that sufferers are unable to reach their full potential. Unfortunately, they usually suffer other mental health co morbidities as well as anxiety including depression, oppositional behaviours and aggression.



\*Their mothers when recognised then find it so hard to get help due to the shortage of psychiatrists who treat ADD.

August 2020