



# ACCOMMODATING A.D.H.D.

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At first glance, Ally Andreasen '18 seems like another high-achieving student. When taking a closer look, her hyperactive tendencies become more noticeable. She fidgets in class, loses track of time or will not remember the question she is in the process of answering.

Andreasen was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) in sixth grade. "We had an idea that I had it long before then, since [my mom's] a social worker and could identify the symptoms pretty well," Andreasen said.

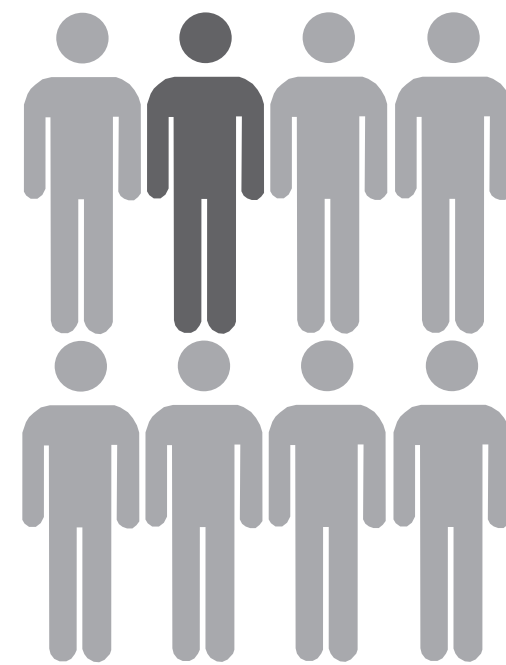
Being diagnosed with ADHD is a long process that focuses more on past symptoms than ongoing symptoms. There are explicit symptoms for ADHD that can be seen in behavioral reports and records, as well as any information left from past teachers. A person cannot suddenly develop ADHD symptoms, as it is a life-long disorder. Psychologists match the symptoms with those shown in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition, also known as the DSM-5.

The process of treating ADHD involves several kinds of therapy or medication. Amy Ziegenhorn, a therapist working for Orchard Place, believes that one-third to even one-half of her clients have some form of ADHD. According to the DSM-5, ADHD and ADD are no longer considered separate disorders but instead different symptoms of a disorder.

However, there are not many natural treatments for ADHD beyond behavioral therapy. "The difficulty with ADHD is that it's not necessarily outside distractions," Andreasen said. "They can add to the distraction, but the distraction is really coming from inside your brain."

She compared her ADHD to a door that people have in their brains. "The door controls what information is going in and out," she said.

## Regularity of ADHD per gender



### How much does it cost?

**\$14,576**

Average cost of  
ADHD per person

**42.5**  
**Billion**

Yearly cost to  
Americans

But to her, people with ADHD do not have that door. Instead, it is more like a gaping hole in a wall. Without that door, information is constantly entering their brains, making it difficult to focus. Andreasen continued to explain how it feels to her before repeating herself, then falling silent. “I lost my train of thought,” she said.

Throughout the interview, Andreasen began fidgeting, a habit Ziegenhorn says helps hyperactive ADHD sufferers focus in on conversations and lectures. Andreasen had to stop mid-sentence and ask for the question to be repeated, or she would restart from the beginning of the answer.

Andreasen still finds homework a struggle. She does not struggle with the subject matter. Instead, she struggles because distraction-free zones do not exist for her. “Every stimulus leads to another stimulus for me,” she said.

Last year, Andreasen tried waking up early in the morning to do homework. She would go to bed at 8 p.m. and wake up at 3 a.m., but found the tactic unhelpful. Not only was she struggling to adjust to her new sleep schedule but she still managed to get distracted while in a completely quiet house. “You could be in a completely empty room and get distracted by your own breathing,” she said. “You might read a word and you’ll go on this crazy train of thought and 20 minutes later you’ll be contemplating the meaning of life.”

She explained that ADHD does not keep her from being able to focus on things, it just keeps her from being able to choose what she focuses on. “People have the misconception that ADHD is complete lack of focus,” Andreasen said. “It’s a lack of executive functioning skills. It’s not a lack of focus, it’s a lack of regulated focus.”

Every object in her room became a potential distraction. If there is something she is more interested in, she will be able to focus on it for hours without realizing how much time

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-Ally Andreasen

is passing. For Andreasen, it is just as easy to become focused and immersed in her current activity than it is to become distracted by another stimulus, especially if it is an activity she enjoys. “A lot of times you can hyperfocus on particular things you’re interested in and you’ll be able to do that thing for hours and not realize how much time is passing,” she said.

Andreasen remembers effects of ADHD throughout her entire life. “A lot of times dur-

ing elementary school, when we would free-read around the room, I would not realize when the teacher called us back to our desks or something,” she said. “And I’d be under a table or something for the next twenty minutes.”

Even now that she is taking medication, Andreasen occasionally struggles with staying focused. “Today I might check my email and realize after 30 minutes of sending and checking emails or looking at colleges online that class had started and it’s been going for a while,” she said.

Andreasen does acknowledge that being a student with ADHD is not easy. She faces struggles daily when studying or finishing assignments. However, she still does not consider ADHD an excuse for this inattentiveness but instead a reason for it. “If it keeps you from doing something, it’s not an excuse, it’s a reason,” she said. “If you broke your leg and still have to walk your neighbors dog, it isn’t an excuse to not walk the dog, it’s a reason you can’t.”

However, Andreasen does not believe that ADHD is a permanent setback. She works to find ways to prevent distractions and actively helps herself focus on the task at hand. “You can’t make yourself focus, but you can find ways to get around the distraction,” she said. “You can’t give up on your life because you have a learning disability, you just have to find another way to get there,” she said.