College Students With ADHD May Earn Poor Grades and Drop Out

College students with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder tend to get lower GPAs and are less likely to graduate.

March 18, 2021 By Alicia Green

College is tough for many young people. But it can be even more daunting for those with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). New findings published in the Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology suggest that college students with the disorder are more likely to receive lower grades and drop out of school, reports HealthDay.

For the study, researchers tracked 406 students from freshman year through their senior year. At the start of the investigation, 97 students with ADHD were on medication, while 104 with the condition weren't taking treatment. The remaining participants didn't have the disorder.

Results showed that students with ADHD tended to have a lower grade point average (GPA) during all four years. In particular, those on treatment were further behind, with GPAs of almost 2.5 in their final two years of college. In general, students without the disorder maintained a GPA above 3.0.

One reason students being treated for ADHD might have fared worse than those not on treatment is that those taking meds might have started off with more severe ADHD symptoms, explained George DuPaul, PhD, a professor of school psychology at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania and the lead study researcher.

Scientists noted that undergraduates suffering from ADHD often had a difficult time completing four years of college. Of those who weren't on meds, 49% graduated or finished eight semesters, compared with 59% of students without the condition. Among those on ADHD medication, 54% completed eight semesters or graduated.

DuPaul explained that colleges offer students with ADHD support and services, but these young adults must seek them out.

Of those students involved in the inquiry, more than half sought no academic support. This might have been due to lack of awareness or interest, according to DuPaul.

DuPaul stressed that students with ADHD should avail themselves of supportive services in college. He also suggested that parents talk to their children before college starts to make them aware of potential challenges they might face and how to access help.

For related coverage, read “ADHD Drugs Increase Psychosis Risk in Young People.”

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