
The Psychology of Medication

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Full Disclosure

- I am a psychologist and therefore don't prescribe, but definitely have a bias in favor of medication for ADHD.
- I have done some consulting for ADHD pharmaceutical companies, but never more than 5% of my income in a year.
 - The vast majority of my income is from seeing clients.

An Interesting Contradiction

- The safety and effectiveness of ADHD medication has been demonstrated in thousands of studies.

YET

- There is often a strong resistance to trying medication or a preference to try everything else first.

Goal = Good Decisions

- There is no perfect or one-size-fits-all treatment, so it involves personal choices.
- Today's goal: Help you think about treatment options and make well informed, well considered decisions that are consistent with your goals and values.
 - Or to help your patients, clients, students, etc.

Facts vs Opinions

- Facts: Objectively accurate and verifiable information.
 - E.g. More people with ADHD benefit from stimulants than non-stimulants.
- Opinions: Positions based on personal preferences and interpretation of facts.
 - E.g. I believe that it is often worth trying medication for ADHD to see what it might do.

Combine Facts and Opinions

- We are more likely to make bad decisions when we assume that an opinion is a fact.
 - Inaccurate information tends to lead to worse decisions.

- Good decisions are based in facts but guided by opinions/preferences.
 - Facts are universal whereas opinions are personal—most problems need both.

DIAGNOSIS

Two Truths

1. Accurate diagnosis guides effective treatment.
 - ❑ Accurate diagnosis suggests that certain treatments or strategies are more or less likely to be effective.
2. Good self-knowledge is a crucial component to sustained success.
 - ❑ Self-knowledge helps us make good choices about how to approach challenges.

Separate Diagnosis and Treatment

- Some people resist getting diagnosed because they don't want to take medication.
 - Diagnosis merely leads to a clearer picture of treatment options, not a mandate.
- Some people want to try medication just to see what it does.
 - Response to stimulants does not prove a diagnosis of ADHD (nor does a poor response disprove it).

Mind/Body Duality

- Psychological conditions are often seen as different from medical conditions (e.g., diabetes).
 - Willpower is believed to be sufficient to overcome psychological matters.
 - And if you can't. . .
- Therefore there is often less stigma in having and treating medical conditions.

Accepting a Diagnosis

- Some people simply don't understand ADHD.
 - Some people have poor self-awareness.
- Some people believe that accepting a diagnosis means there is something flawed about them.
- Some people see a diagnosis as a liberating explanation for prior difficulties.
 - Everybody is better at some things and worse at others.

Excuses vs. Explanations

- Excuses lower expectations and are ultimately limiting.
 - Depend on others' willingness.
- Explanations offer understanding for why something is happening and therefore what one can do about it.
 - Knowledge is power, but the responsibility for change is on the individual to use that information.

TREATMENT

ADHD Medication Myths

- They are addictive.
- They cause irreparable side effects.
- They are over-prescribed.
- They are used to control kids.
- They give an unfair advantage (i.e. cheating).
- Natural remedies are superior and safer.

These are all inaccurate or over-statements.

Reasons for Not Trying Medication

- Don't see the need
- Resistant to accepting the diagnosis
- Inaccurate beliefs about risks
- Don't want to become dependent on it
- Prefer other interventions first or instead (behavioral, natural)
- Expense: doctor and prescriptions
- Co-occurring conditions, interactions

Reasons for Discontinuing Medication

- Side effects
- Loss of insurance coverage or prescriber
- Unintentional (don't get around to getting refills, simply stop taking them)
- Want to learn to do it themselves (don't understand ADHD)
- Lack of benefit (real or perceived)—may be related to insufficient dose or wrong med

What Medication Does

- Medication increases activity in the part of the brain related to executive functions.
- Medication improves EFs: more reliable, consistent, planful, timely, etc.
 - Better able to apply your abilities.
- Medication closes the gap between intentions and actions.

Performance = Demands vs Abilities

- We can improve performance by:
 - Lowering demands: reducing distractions, writing a list, setting an alarm, etc.
 - Increasing abilities: using medication; developing a strong mindset; sort of by getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising.
- Medication isn't the only option. . .but what is your desired level of performance?

Personal Circumstances Matter

- Research tells us the probability of effectiveness for groups (people with ADHD) or sub-groups (ADHD plus bipolar).
 - Start with the treatments that are most likely to be effective, then work down. . .
- But your circumstances may differ in important ways.
 - E.g., a strong history of addiction, about to lose your job.

Simple Value: Return on Investment

- Value depends on benefits versus costs.
 - Is it worth it?
 - Increasing the benefits or decreasing the costs changes the math.
- In evaluating potential benefits and side effects, we need to also consider the costs of not treating (e.g., cancer and chemotherapy).
 - The costs of untreated ADHD are very clear (at least for groups).

Complex: How You Define Success

- Success also depends on performance compared to expectations.
 - What are you expecting this treatment to do?
 - What costs and side effects are acceptable?
- Perceptions of success also depend on what you look for and focus on (benefits vs side effects).

No Panaceas

- Whether you take meds or not, good performance still depends on using good habits and systems, working hard, getting enough sleep, eating well, etc.
- These are easier to maintain with meds, but medication won't undo bad habits.

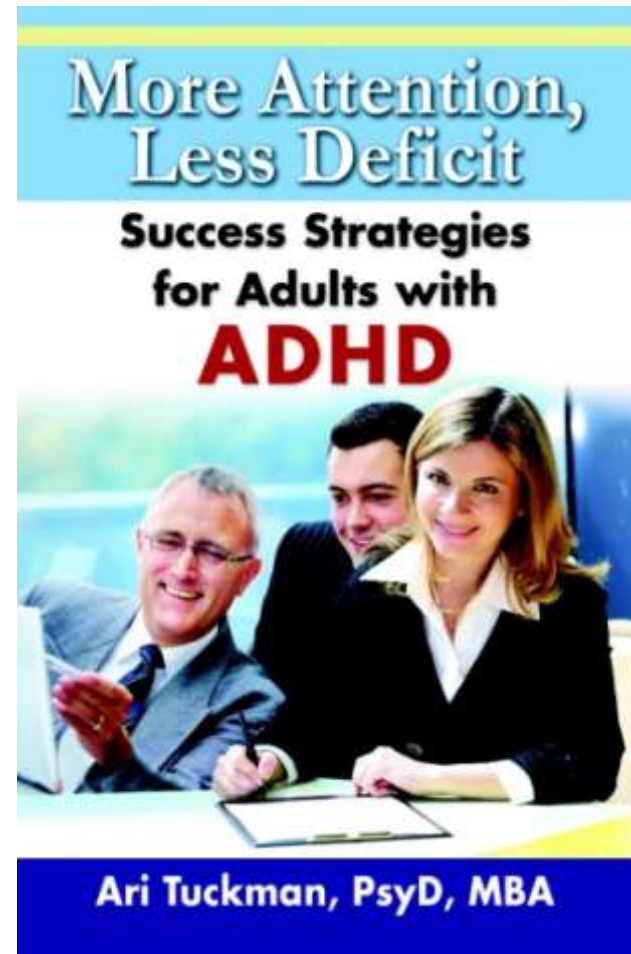
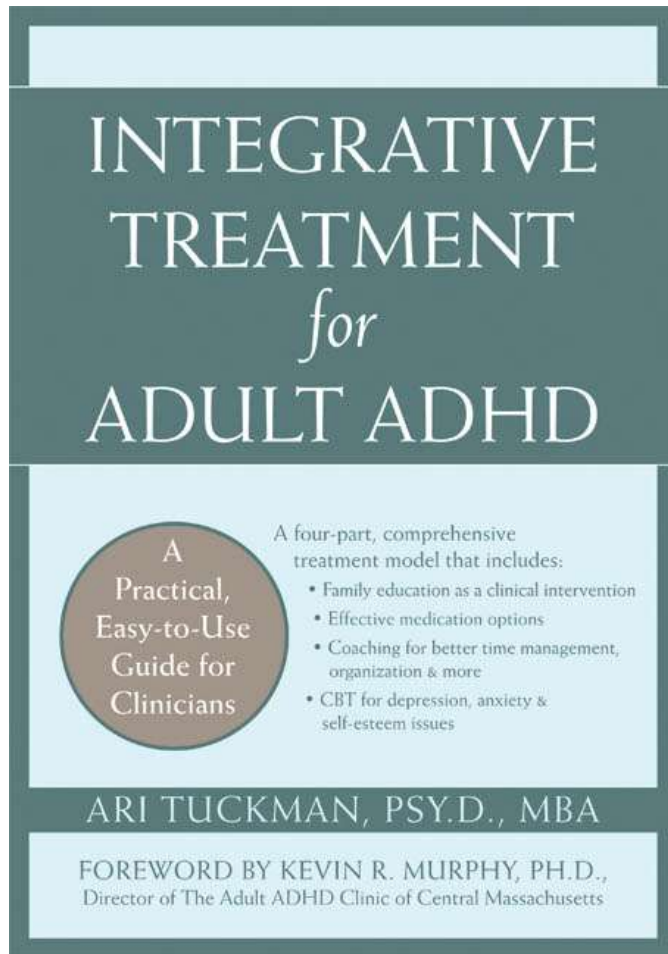
Dependency

- Some people don't like the idea of becoming dependent on medication (i.e., addicted).
- Addictive dependency makes your life smaller and carries a high cost elsewhere.
- Medication helps you live a bigger life, so it's a different "dependency".
 - Am I dependent on my contact lenses?

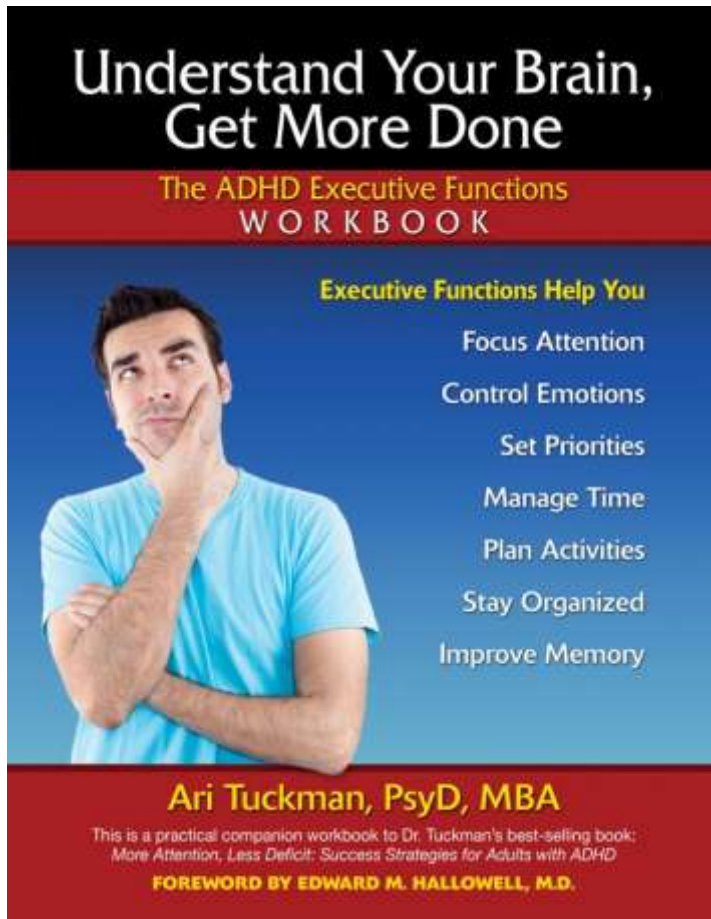
If You Try It, Get It Right

- Find a prescriber who knows ADHD medication and follows accepted protocols.
- Be willing to try multiple doses and medications, if necessary.
- Don't change too many things at once.
- Pay attention to the effects and side effects.
- Bring a second person to appointments.
- Manage your lifestyle well.

The Books



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