



Knowing What to Expect: Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Assessment

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common disorders seen in childhood. It is estimated that between 4% and 12% of all school-aged children may be affected.

Children with ADHD may have difficulty controlling their behavior in school and social settings, and often fail to achieve their full academic potential. The child may be easily distracted, unable to pay attention and follow directions, be overly active and/or have poor self-control.

What is the assessment and diagnostic process?

The evaluation of ADHD requires gathering information from several people. Your child's main health care professional will combine the information to form a 'picture' of your child which allows him/her to make a diagnosis and create a treatment plan.

How do I select a professional to perform the assessment?

ADHD assessments should be done by an experienced psychiatrist, pediatrician, primary care doctor, psychologist, or therapist. The selection of the professional you choose should depend on factors such as:

- Type of symptoms your child has,
- The complexity of the symptoms, and
- Whether medication is needed.

You may find the following chart helpful in choosing a professional.

Type of Professional	Able to Assess and Diagnose?	Able to Prescribe Medications?
Psychiatrist	Yes	Yes
Pediatrician	Yes	Yes
Primary Care Doctor	Yes	Yes
Psychologist	Yes	Sometimes
Therapist	Yes	No

If your child is 5 years old or younger, we strongly recommend that you have your child evaluated by either a developmental pediatrician or a child psychiatrist before starting medication.

What is a diagnostic assessment?

A complete assessment for ADHD involves:

1. Gathering information about your child from key people such as teachers, school counselors, day care providers, coaches, health care professionals, family and friends. Professionals will often ask these people to rate their observations of the child's behavior on evaluation forms to compare the child's behaviors to those of other children the same age.

- a) This information will be used to decide if the child's behaviors and history meet the required criteria and levels for inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsivity.
 - b) This information will also be used to rule out other conditions that may look like ADHD such as:
 - Childhood depression or post traumatic stress disorder
 - Oppositional defiant disorder
 - Learning disabilities
 - Hearing and visual problems
 - Misinterpretation of age appropriate behaviors of childhood
 - Poor learning environment – such as:
 - Mismatched level of schoolwork and intelligence
 - Mismatched learning style with the teaching approach in the classroom
 - Over-crowded classroom
 - Too many high maintenance students in the classroom
 - Medical illnesses such as:
 - Petit mal seizures
 - Middle ear infection
2. Other diagnostic tests are not typically recommended to make a diagnosis of ADHD, but if the 'picture' of your child is still not clear to the professional, he/she may recommend other assessment tools or medical tests to answer their questions such as:
- Neuropsychological or psychological testing
 - Academic, intelligence, and learning skills testing
 - Hearing and visual testing

The health care professional uses all this information to decide on the diagnosis and determine the best treatment plan for your child. Family involvement using behavioral treatment is often a very effective treatment method. Evaluation forms may also be used to measure baseline symptoms and monitor progress as treatment is begun.

References:

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2000). Clinical practice guideline: Diagnosis and evaluation of the child with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Pediatrics*, 105(5), 1158-1171.

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*. (4th ed., text revision). Washington, DC.

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