

What is Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition that affects about 3-5 percent of people in the United States.³ People with ADHD may have trouble focusing on tasks, paying attention, sitting still, and controlling their behavior. As a result, ADHD can cause problems at home, school, work, and with relationships.

ADHD can be especially challenging for school-aged children. These children often get lower grades, get in trouble more frequently, and are more likely to drop out of school than children without ADHD.⁵

What are the symptoms of ADHD?¹

The symptoms of ADHD usually fall into three categories:

Inattention

- Makes careless mistakes
- Has difficulty concentrating
- Has a hard time following instructions
- Is unorganized
- Frequently loses or forgets things
- Is easily distracted

Hyperactivity

- Has a hard time remaining seated
- Talks excessively
- Frequently fidgets or squirms

Impulsivity

- Acts on impulse – such as going on spending sprees or eating large amounts of food at one time
- Seems rushed to answer before questions are completed
- Often interrupts others in conversation or activities
- Impatient

ADHD is usually first noticed during the toddler or early school years. Some symptoms may also be shown by people without the disorder. This is because some behaviors may be normal for certain ages. However, for people with ADHD, symptoms are more frequently seen and are more severe than is typically observed in people at a similar level of development.

The symptoms must be present in at least two settings, such as school, work, or home. For example, if a child only has trouble paying attention at school but nowhere else, then they probably don't have ADHD. However, because only a professional can make a diagnosis, it's important to talk to your doctor if you think your child might have ADHD.

Can adults have ADHD?

It used to be thought that children with ADHD “grew out of it” as they got older, but newer research shows that may not be the case.⁴ In fact, many people have symptoms that continue

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throughout adulthood. It's widely thought that while children may outgrow the hyperactivity part of ADHD, other symptoms often remain. Also, the symptoms may change or decrease over time.²

What causes ADHD?

When a child is diagnosed with ADHD, many parents blame themselves and wonder what they did "wrong." However, it appears that how a child is raised has little, if any, effect on whether or not they will get the disorder.

No one really knows what causes ADHD, but genetics most likely play a role.

How is ADHD treated?

There's no cure for ADHD at this time, but there are treatments available to help manage the symptoms. Treatment methods vary depending on the person and their symptoms.

Medications

Medications are commonly used to treat symptoms of ADHD. Medications most frequently used are known as *stimulants*. Stimulants may help reduce hyperactivity and impulsivity. They may also help improve focus, concentration, and coordination.³

Therapy

Therapy is also a commonly used treatment. Therapy may improve academic, social, and communication skills. It can also help in learning problem-solving skills, and to better understand and manage the feelings that can come along with having ADHD.

The most effective treatment is usually a combination of medication and therapy. However, the type of treatment that works best for one person may be different from what works for another. It's important to work with your doctor to find the best treatment for you or your child.

How can I help my child?⁵

Being a parent of a child with ADHD can be challenging. But, with proper treatment and your help, you can help your child learn to manage their symptoms.

- **Work with your child's school/teacher.** It's important to work as a team to find the best style of learning for your child.
- **Consider getting a tutor.** If your child is struggling with school work, don't be afraid to get them some extra help.
- **Communicate clearly.** Use clear, brief directions with your child. Make sure they make eye contact with you when you're speaking with them.
- **Reward your child.** When you see improvement in your child or when they're doing something well, reward them. Work with your treatment professional to determine how to reward your child appropriately.

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- **Give directions one at a time instead of giving multiple tasks all at once.** This can help limit distractions.
- **Allow frequent activity breaks.** Giving your child a chance to get their energy out can help them stay more focused when they need to be.
- **Take steps to minimize distractions.** Turn off the TV and email when your child is doing their homework. Encourage them to sit in the front of the classroom to help them concentrate at school.

How can I manage ADHD as an adult?

Adults with ADHD can also take steps to manage their condition. Some of these tips may also be helpful for children.

- **Develop a routine.** Having a set schedule can help you remember the things you need to do. For children, let them know in advance when there will be a change in routine.
- **Get organized.** Writing things down on a calendar, making lists and charts, and keeping things in one place can help to make things run smoothly.
- **Exercise.** Getting regular physical activity can help to relieve stress and reduce feelings of restlessness.
- **Learn to manage your time.** Always allow yourself more time to do things than you think you'll need. Plan to arrive early when you have important appointments.
- **Break tasks up into small steps.** Responsibilities can become more manageable when you tackle them one small piece at a time.
- **Focus on the present.** Try to concentrate on what's happening in the moment. Don't let your thoughts wander or jump ahead.
- **Use reminders.** Make use of alarm clocks and technology such as email and cell phones. They can be handy in reminding you when you have somewhere you need to be or something you have to do.

ADHD can be challenging. But with the right treatment, these challenges can be overcome. If you think you or someone you know might have ADHD, contact your doctor or health care professional.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder



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