



What is ADHD?

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurological brain disorder. There is a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity/impulsivity that is more severe than in peers. ADHD begins in childhood. Often these symptoms

persist into adulthood. Adults have more inattention type symptoms.

How Common Is ADHD?

ADHD is the most commonly diagnosed mental disorder of children. It is estimated to affect 3%-5% of children (nearly two million American children), and is more common in boys than in girls. It is discovered during the early school years, when a child begins to have problems paying attention.

What Are the Symptoms of ADHD?

Symptoms of ADHD are generally grouped into three categories: inattention, hyperactivity and impulsiveness.

Inattention

- Is easily distracted
- Does not follow directions or finish tasks
- Does not appear to be listening when someone is speaking
- Does not pay attention and makes careless mistakes
- Is forgetful about daily activities
- Has problems organizing daily tasks
- Dislikes activities that require sitting still
- Often loses things, including personal items
- Has a tendency to daydream

(Resources: www.web4health.info; www.medicinenet.com; www.cdc.gov)

Hyperactivity

- Often squirms, fidgets or bounces when sitting
- Does not stay seated as expected
- Has difficulty playing quietly
- Is always moving, such as running or climbing on things (In teens and adults, this is commonly described as restlessness.)
- Talks excessively

Impulsivity

- Has difficulty waiting for his or her turn
- Blurts out answers before the question has been completed
- Often interrupts others

What Causes ADHD?

Although the exact cause of ADHD is not known, researchers suspect that there are several factors that may contribute to the condition, including:

Heredity: It is believed that ADHD is a highly genetic disorder. The fact that ADHD tends to run in families suggests that children may inherit a tendency to develop ADHD from their parents. Approximately 35 percent of parents of children with ADHD have the disorder themselves. It's also not uncommon to discover that other people in the family (siblings, aunts, and/or uncles) also have ADHD. Interestingly, many parents only come to learn about their own ADHD once their child has been diagnosed. This may explain a lifetime of frustrations and prompt them to get help.

Chemical Imbalance: Experts believe an imbalance of the chemicals that help nerve cells in the brain communicate with each other, called neurotransmitters, may be a factor in the development of symptoms.



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What is ADHD? continued . . .

Brain Changes: Areas of the brain that control attention are less active in children with ADHD than in children without the disorder.

The following are other factors that may contribute to the development of ADHD or that may trigger symptoms:

- Poor nutrition, infections and substance abuse (including cigarette and alcohol use) during pregnancy may be contributing factors. They can affect brain development.
- Exposure to toxins, such as lead, in early childhood can also affect brain development and may lead to ADHD symptoms.
- Injury to the brain or a brain disorder may trigger ADHD symptoms.

Is There Help for ADHD?

Treatment begins with awareness. Although ADHD is currently the most commonly diagnosed childhood behavioral disorder, ADHD is far more common among adults than people generally recognize. It is believed that more than eight million adults have the disorder. The vast majority have not been diagnosed.

Treatment options

ADHD cannot be cured, but many of the symptoms that interfere with functioning and cause distress can be controlled. Despite negative publicity, usually a combination of behavioral modification, social skills training, parent support and medication produce the best results.

- *Behavior modification therapy* - includes strategies for supporting good behavior and decreasing problem behavior by the child.
- *Social skills training* can help the child learn new behaviors such as taking turns and sharing, that will enable him/her to better function in social situations.
- *Parent support* - this focuses on better understanding of the disorder, and specific routines that help ADHD children manage.
- *Medication* - certain medications called stimulants may be used to help control hyperactivity, impulsive behavior, and increase attention span. Commonly used stimulants include Adderall, Concerta, Dexedrine, Focalin, Metadate, and Ritalin. Some children with ADHD respond to a non-stimulant medication such as Strattera. Other medications may also be helpful.

ADHD treatment is best approached as a partnership between the child, family, school personnel, and health-care professionals. Since every child's treatment should be customized to his or her needs, be sure to help all parties understand your child's particular challenges.

How Can You Help?

Navigating the system is difficult. Here are some ideas to make this process easier.

- Get Educated about all treatments for ADHD. This will help you sort out the facts based on evidence.
- Choose a team of professionals that you are comfortable with. A medical doctor familiar with all modes of treatment of ADHD is extremely important. Make sure your child gets a good physical exam. Be sure all professionals are willing to communicate and work together for your child's best interest.
- Ask direct questions like what specific symptoms do they see? How much experience do they have working with ADHD children? How do they feel about medication for ADHD? (Experts willing to consider all options help the most.)
- Evaluate facts versus fiction. Red dyes, high sugar content, watching too much TV, and food allergies have all been touted to cause ADHD. Although in some cases eliminating the above can make a difference no scientific studies support this.
- Proper nutrition is essential for normal development. Although some vitamins/herbs combinations may provide mild relief, scientific studies do not validate this.
- Real risks occur with any medication. We know stimulants increase blood pressure and pulse. Strattera can cause liver problems and has a black box warning. Rare but serious side effects exist. Weigh the risks versus benefits with your physician.
- *Don't allow your neighbor's anti-medication stand to influence your decision. You are making the best choice for your child.*
- Realize that we have over 50 years of scientific research supporting the effectiveness of ADHD medications. Thousands of children suffer educationally and socially because parents refuse to consider medication. By closing your mind to medication, you may be closing future opportunities for your child.