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Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) - Topic Overview

What is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)?

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a condition in which a person has trouble paying attention and focusing on tasks, tends to act without thinking, and has trouble sitting still. It may begin in early childhood and can continue into adulthood. Without treatment, ADHD can cause problems at home, school, work, and with [relationships](#). In the past, ADHD was called attention deficit disorder (ADD).

What causes ADHD?

The exact cause is not clear, but ADHD tends to run in families.

What are the symptoms?

The three [types of ADHD](#) symptoms include:

- **Trouble paying attention.** People with ADHD are easily distracted and have a hard time focusing on any one task.
- **Trouble sitting still for even a short time.** This is called hyperactivity. [Children with ADHD](#) may squirm, fidget, or run around at the wrong times. [Teens](#) and adults often feel restless and fidgety and are not able to enjoy reading or other quiet activities.
- **Acting before thinking.** People with ADHD may talk too loud, laugh too loud, or become angrier than the situation calls for. Children may not be able to wait for their turn or to share. This makes it hard for them to play with other children. Teens and adults seem to "leap before they look." They may make quick decisions that have a long-term impact on their lives. They may spend too much money or change jobs often.

How is ADHD diagnosed?

ADHD is often diagnosed when a child is between 6 and 12 years old. Teachers may notice symptoms in children who are in this age group.

First, the child will have a [physical exam](#) to make sure that he or she does not have other problems such as [learning disabilities](#), [depression](#), or [anxiety](#) disorder. The doctor will use guidelines from the American Psychiatric Association to diagnose ADHD. The doctor may also look at written reports about the child's behavior. Parents, teachers, and others who have regular contact with the child prepare these reports.

How is it treated?

There is no cure for ADHD, but treatment may help control the symptoms. Treatment may include medicines and behavior therapy. Parents and other adults need to closely watch children after they begin to take medicines for ADHD. The medicines may cause side effects such as loss of appetite, [headaches](#) or stomachaches, [tics](#) or twitches, and problems sleeping. Side effects usually get better after a few weeks. If they don't, the doctor can lower the dose.

Therapy focuses on making changes in the environment to improve the child's behavior. Often, counseling and extra support at home and at school help children succeed at school and feel better about themselves.

How does ADHD affect adults?

Many adults don't realize that they have ADHD until their children are diagnosed. Then they begin to notice their own symptoms. Adults with ADHD may find it hard to focus, organize, and finish tasks. They often forget things. But they also often are very creative and curious. They love to ask questions and keep learning. Some adults with ADHD learn to manage their lives and find careers that let them use those strengths.

But many adults have trouble at home and work. As a group, adults with ADHD have higher divorce rates. They also are more likely to smoke and have more [substance abuse](#) problems than adults without ADHD. Fewer adults with ADHD enter college, and fewer graduate. Treatment with medicine, counseling, and behavior therapy can help adults with ADHD.

Frequently Asked Questions

Learning about ADHD:

What is ADHD?
Who is affected?
What are the symptoms?
What causes ADHD?
Can ADHD be prevented?
What are the risk factors for ADHD?
What are some myths about ADHD?

Being diagnosed:

When should I see a doctor?
Are there other conditions with similar symptoms?
What kinds of exams and tests are needed to diagnose ADHD?

Getting treatment:

How is ADHD usually treated?



How do I decide whether to treat my child?

What medicines are available for treatment?
What types of behavior therapy can help?
Is there any complementary or alternative medicine available?

Ongoing concerns:

Does behavior change with age?
Are medicines for ADHD overprescribed?
What steps can I take to help my child avoid behavior problems?

Living with ADHD:



How can I help my child get things done?



How can I help my child build self-esteem?



How can I help my child get the most out of school?

Source: <http://www.webmd.com/add-adhd/tc/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd-topic-overview?page=2>