

ADHD

Patient Information Fact Sheet

›What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD or AD/HD) is a neurological condition characterized by inattentiveness, impulsive behavior, and hyperactivity. You may also hear it referred to as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). There are three different types of ADHD depending on which symptoms are strongest in the individual: predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive-impulsive, and combined. ADHD usually starts at about 18 months of age and becomes more noticeable by three years. It is often diagnosed at 7 or 8 years of age when the many symptoms are apparent. ADHD may improve around puberty but continues into adult life, usually with a reduction in symptoms if treated appropriately. Although ADHD does not start in adulthood, some people may have had symptoms in childhood that were not diagnosed correctly until later in life. Boys are more likely than girls to have been diagnosed with ADHD.

ADHD is largely misunderstood. Sufferers tend to be intelligent and have normal to high IQs. They are often creative and intuitive but many do not reach the level of achievement of which they are capable if untreated. If the condition is not recognized and treated, the child will likely underachieve and may never realize his or her full potential. This can have a significant effect upon achievements in adult life. ADHD is found in all social classes and can affect children of any nationality or ethnic background; it affects children all over the world.

›What causes ADHD?

ADHD is thought to be an inherited or genetic disorder. Some experts believe that it might also be caused by damage to a child's brain either during pregnancy, at birth, or after birth. Alcohol and tobacco use during pregnancy are also considered risk factors in addition to premature delivery and low birth weight. In most cases a combination of factors will have contributed to its development. In the past it has been suggested that ADHD may be caused by bad parenting, social class or by diet—these factors are no longer considered to contribute to the development of ADHD.

›What are the symptoms of ADHD?

Most children with ADHD will have a range of symptoms. These symptoms will often vary in severity from one child to the next. Symptoms include:

- **Inattention and becoming easily distracted.** Children with ADHD often fail to finish tasks and may flit from one thing to the next. Often they will forget what they are supposed to be doing or will lose things such as books or toys. Their short-term memory is poor and this, combined with a short attention span, can often cause learning difficulties such as dyslexia or problems with speech and coordination. This all happens despite the child having a normal IQ level.
- **Difficulty socializing.** Children with ADHD may also find it hard to socialize both with their own peer group and with adults. This can present in various ways: They may act silly among other children and become the classroom clown. They may try to intrude upon others' conversations and ask incessant questions. Most of their actions are impulsive and may be inappropriate as the child does not think before speaking or acting. They may be constantly fidgeting and restless and are often prone to temper tantrums.

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Unfortunately, as a result of their behavior, children with ADHD are often criticized and do not do well at school. This can lead to low self-esteem and eventually to depression in older children. Children with ADHD are often very creative or athletic. They are sensitive to their surroundings and may appreciate art, music and nature. If a child is not diagnosed and treated, other problems may develop as the child reaches puberty. Compulsive, obsessive and emotional disorders may be added to the problems already suffered by the child or adult with ADHD.

›How is ADHD treated?

The special learning requirements of children with ADHD need to be addressed at school and most districts have programs in place and often teachers with additional certification to teach children with learning disabilities. Children may also need counseling to help them understand their condition and to boost their self-esteem. Parents and teachers of affected children may be able to help in a number of ways, such as creating a daily routine for the child, always speaking to them on a one-on-one basis, or using rewards to persuade them to listen or concentrate. Medication may be prescribed if psychotherapy and extra support are not successful in adapting a child's behavior. This will be given in tablet form and may be taken on a long-term basis until about the age of 10. Drugs currently used in the treatment of ADHD include **dextroamphetamine** (Dexedrine) and **mixed amphetamine salts** (Adderall), **dexmethylphenidate** (Focalin), **methylphenidate** (Ritalin, Concerta), **atomoxetine** (Strattera), and **lisdexamfetamine** (Vyvanse). Close supervision is required when these drugs are used. If possible, pediatricians will usually refer children with ADHD to a specialist with an interest in the condition.

›Further information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/

National Institute of Mental Health:
www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/complete-index.shtml

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