

# Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a problem with behavior issues based on the way the brain functions (*neurobehavioral disorder*). It is a common reason for behavior and academic problems in school.

## SYMPTOMS

There are 3 types of ADHD. The 3 types and some of the symptoms include:

- Inattentive.
  - Gets bored or distracted easily.
  - Loses or forgets things. Forgets to hand in homework.
  - Has trouble organizing or completing tasks.
  - Difficulty staying on task.
  - An inability to organize daily tasks and school work.
  - Leaving projects, chores, or homework unfinished.
  - Trouble paying attention or responding to details. Careless mistakes.
  - Difficulty following directions. Often seems like is not listening.
  - Dislikes activities that require sustained attention (like chores or homework).
- Hyperactive-impulsive.
  - Feels like it is impossible to sit still or stay in a seat. Fidgeting with hands and feet.
  - Trouble waiting turn.
  - Talking too much or out of turn. Interruptive.
  - Speaks or acts impulsively.
  - Aggressive, disruptive behavior.
  - Constantly busy or on the go; noisy.
  - Often leaves seat when they are expected to remain seated.
  - Often runs or climbs where it is not appropriate, or feels very restless.
- Combined.
  - Has symptoms of both of the above.

Often children with ADHD feel discouraged about themselves and with school. They often perform well below their abilities in school.

As children get older, the excess motor activities can calm down, but the problems with paying attention and staying organized persist. Most children do not outgrow ADHD but with good treatment can learn to cope with the symptoms.

## DIAGNOSIS

When ADHD is suspected, the diagnosis should be made by professionals trained in ADHD. This professional will collect information about the individual suspected of having ADHD. Information must be collected from various settings where the person lives, works, or attends school.

Diagnosis will include:

- Confirming symptoms began in childhood.
- Ruling out other reasons for the child's behavior.

- The health care providers will check with the child's school and check their medical records.
- They will talk to teachers and parents.
- Behavior rating scales for the child will be filled out by those dealing with the child on a daily basis.

A diagnosis is made only after all information has been considered.

## TREATMENT

Treatment usually includes behavioral treatment, tutoring or extra support in school, and stimulant medicines. Because of the way a person's brain works with ADHD, these medicines decrease impulsivity and hyperactivity and increase attention. This is different than how they would work in a person who does not have ADHD. Other medicines used include antidepressants and certain blood pressure medicines.

Most experts agree that treatment for ADHD should address all aspects of the person's functioning. Along with medicines, treatment should include structured classroom management at school. Parents should reward good behavior, provide constant discipline, and set limits. Tutoring should be available for the child as needed.

ADHD is a lifelong condition. If untreated, the disorder can have long-term serious effects into adolescence and adulthood.

## HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Often with ADHD there is a lot of frustration among family members dealing with the condition. Blame and anger are also feelings that are common. In many cases, because the problem affects the family as a whole, the entire family may need help. A therapist can help the family find better ways to handle the disruptive behaviors of the person with ADHD and promote change. If the person with ADHD is young, most of the therapist's work is with the parents. Parents will learn techniques for coping with and improving their child's behavior. Sometimes only the child with the ADHD needs counseling. Your health care providers can help you make these decisions.
- Children with ADHD may need help learning how to organize. Some helpful tips include:
  - Keep routines the same every day from wake-up time to bedtime. Schedule all activities, including homework and playtime. Keep the schedule in a place where the person with ADHD will often see it. Mark schedule changes as far in advance as possible.
  - Schedule outdoor and indoor recreation.
  - Have a place for everything and keep everything in its place. This includes clothing, backpacks, and school supplies.
  - Encourage writing down assignments and bringing home needed books. Work with your child's teachers for assistance in organizing school work.
- Offer your child a well-balanced diet. Breakfast that includes a balance of whole grains, protein, and fruits or vegetables is especially important for school performance. Children should avoid drinks with caffeine including:
  - Soft drinks.
  - Coffee.
  - Tea.
  - However, some older children (*adolescents*) may find these drinks helpful in improving their attention. Because it can also be common for adolescents with ADHD to become addicted to caffeine, talk with your health care provider about what is a safe amount of caffeine intake for your child.

- Children with ADHD need consistent rules that they can understand and follow. If rules are followed, give small rewards. Children with ADHD often receive, and expect, criticism. Look for good behavior and praise it. Set realistic goals. Give clear instructions. Look for activities that can foster success and self-esteem. Make time for pleasant activities with your child. Give lots of affection.
- Parents are their children's greatest advocates. Learn as much as possible about ADHD. This helps you become a stronger and better advocate for your child. It also helps you educate your child's teachers and instructors if they feel inadequate in these areas. Parent support groups are often helpful. A national group with local chapters is called Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD).

### **SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:**

- Your child has repeated muscle twitches, cough, or speech outbursts.
- Your child has sleep problems.
- Your child has a marked loss of appetite.
- Your child develops depression.
- Your child has new or worsening behavioral problems.
- Your child develops dizziness.
- Your child has a racing heart.
- Your child has stomach pains.
- Your child develops headaches.

### **SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:**

- Your child has been diagnosed with depression or anxiety and the symptoms seem to be getting worse.
- Your child has been depressed and suddenly appears to have increased energy or motivation.
- You are worried that your child is having a bad reaction to a medication he or she is taking for ADHD.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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