

ADHD Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a mental health disorder that can cause above-normal levels of hyperactive and impulsive behaviors. People with ADHD may also have trouble focusing their attention on a single task or sitting still for long periods of time.

Both adults and children can have ADHD..

ADHD symptoms

A wide range of behaviors are associated with ADHD. Some of the more common ones include:

- **having trouble focusing or concentrating on tasks**
- **being forgetful about completing tasks**
- **being easily distracted**
- **having difficulty sitting still**
- **interrupting people while they're talking**

If you or your child has ADHD, you may have some or all of these symptoms. The symptoms you have depend on the type of ADHD you have.

Types of ADHD

To make ADHD diagnoses more consistent, the APA has grouped the condition into three categories, or types. These types are predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactivity-impulsive, and a combination of both.

Predominantly inattentive

As the name suggests, people with this type of ADHD have **extreme difficulty focusing, finishing tasks, and following instructions.**

Experts also think that many children with the inattentive type of ADHD may not receive a proper diagnosis because they don't tend to disrupt the classroom. This type is most common among **girls** with ADHD.

Predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type

People with this type of ADHD show primarily hyperactive and impulsive behavior. **This can include fidgeting, interrupting people while they're talking, and not being able to wait their turn.**

Although inattention is less of a concern with this type of ADHD, people with predominantly hyperactive-impulsive ADHD may still find it difficult to focus on tasks.

Combined hyperactive-impulsive and inattentive type

This is the most common type of ADHD. People with this combined type of ADHD display both inattentive and hyperactive symptoms. **These include an inability to pay attention, a tendency toward impulsiveness, and above-normal levels of activity and energy.**

The type of ADHD you or your child has will determine how it's treated. The type you have can change over time, so your treatment may change, too.

ADD vs. ADHD

ADD, or attention deficit disorder, is an outdated term. It was previously used to describe people who have problems paying attention but aren't hyperactive. ADHD is the current overarching name of the condition. The term ADHD became official in May 2013, when the APA released **the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)**.

Adult ADHD

More than 60 % of children with ADHD still exhibit symptoms as adults. But for many people, ADHD symptoms decrease or become less frequent as they get older.

That said, treatment is important. Untreated ADHD in adults can have a negative impact on many aspects of life. Symptoms such as trouble managing time, forgetfulness, and impatience can cause problems at work, home, and in all types of relationships.

ADHD in children

One 10 children between ages 5 to 17 years receives an ADHD diagnosis, making this one of the most common childhood neurodevelopmental disorders in the United States.

For children, ADHD is generally associated with problems at school. Children with ADHD often have trouble succeeding in a controlled classroom setting.

Boys are more than twice as likely as girls to receive an ADHD diagnosis. This may be because boys tend to exhibit hallmark symptoms of hyperactivity. Although some girls with ADHD may have the classic symptoms of hyperactivity, many don't. In many cases, **girls with ADHD may:**

- **daydream frequently**
- **be hyper-talkative rather than hyperactive**

Many symptoms of ADHD can be typical childhood behaviors, so it can be hard to know what's ADHD-related and what's not.

What causes ADHD?

Despite how common ADHD is, doctors and researchers still aren't sure what causes the condition. It's believed to have neurological origins. Genetics may also play a role.

Research suggests that a **reduction in dopamine is a factor in ADHD**. Dopamine is a chemical in the brain that helps move signals from one nerve to another. It plays a role in triggering emotional responses and movements.

Other research suggests a **structural difference in the brain**. Findings indicate that people with ADHD have **less gray matter volume**. Gray matter includes the brain areas that help with:

- speech
- self-control
- decision-making
- muscle control

ADHD testing and diagnosis

There's no single test that can tell if you or your child has ADHD. A recent study highlighted the benefits of a new test to diagnose adult ADHD, but many clinicians believe an ADHD diagnosis can't be made based on one test.

To make a diagnosis, your doctor will assess any symptoms you or your child has had over the previous six months.

Your doctor will likely gather information from teachers or family members and may use checklists and rating scales to review symptoms. They'll also do a physical exam to check for other health problems

If they suspect ADHD, they may refer you or your child to an ADHD specialist. Depending on the diagnosis, they may also suggest making an appointment with a psychiatrist or neurologist.

Is ADHD a disability?

While ADHD is a **neurodevelopmental disorder**, it's not considered a learning disability. However, ADHD symptoms can make it harder for you to learn. Also, it's possible for ADHD to occur in some individuals who also have learning disabilities.

To help relieve any impact on learning for children, teachers can map out individual guidelines for a student with ADHD. This may include allowing extra time for assignments and tests or developing a personal reward system.

Although it's not technically a disability, ADHD can have lifelong effects.

ADHD treatment

Treatment for ADHD typically includes behavioral therapies, medication, or both.

Types of therapy include **psychotherapy, or talk therapy**. With talk therapy, you or your child will discuss how ADHD affects your life and ways to help you manage it.

Another therapy type is **behavioral therapy**. This therapy can help you or your child with learning how to monitor and manage your behavior.

Medication can also be very helpful when you're living with ADHD. ADHD medications are designed to affect brain chemicals in a way that enables you to better control your impulses and actions.

ADHD medication

The two main types of medications used to treat ADHD are **stimulants and nonstimulants**.

Central nervous system (CNS) stimulants are the most commonly prescribed ADHD medications. These drugs work by increasing the amounts of the brain chemicals dopamine and norepinephrine.

Examples of these drugs include methylphenidate (Ritalin) and amphetamine-based stimulants (Adderall).

If stimulants don't work well for you or your child, or if they cause troublesome side effects, your doctor may suggest a nonstimulant medication. Certain nonstimulant medications work by increasing levels of norepinephrine in the brain.

These medications include atomoxetine (Strattera) and some **antidepressants** such as bupropion (Wellbutrin).

ADHD medications can have many benefits, as well as side effects

ADHD and depression

If you or your child has ADHD, you're more likely to have depression as well. In fact, the rate of major depression in children with ADHD is more than five times higher than in children without ADHD. Up to 31 percent of adults with ADHD have been found to also have depression.

This may feel like an unfair double whammy, but know that treatments are available for both conditions. The treatments often overlap. Talk therapy can help treat both conditions. Also, certain antidepressants, such as bupropion, can sometimes help ease ADHD symptoms.

Natural remedies for ADHD

In addition to — or instead of — medication, several remedies have been suggested to help improve ADHD symptoms.

- **eat a healthy, balanced diet**
- **get at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day**
- **get plenty of sleep**
- **limit daily screen time from phones, computers, and TV**

Studies have also shown that **yoga, tai chi, spending time** outdoors can help calm overactive minds and may ease ADHD symptoms.

Mindfulness meditation is another option. Research in adults and teens has shown meditation to have positive effects on attention and thought processes, as well as on anxiety and depression.

Avoiding certain allergens and food additives are also potential ways to help reduce ADHD symptoms.

Tips for coping with ADHD

If you or your child has ADHD, a consistent schedule with structure and regular expectations may be helpful. For adults, using lists, keeping a calendar, and setting reminders are good ways to help you get and stay organized. For children, it can be helpful to focus on writing down homework assignments and keeping everyday items, such as toys and backpacks, in assigned spots.

Outlook

For children and adults, untreated ADHD can have a serious impact on your life. It can affect school, work, and relationships. Treatment is important to lessen the effects of the condition.

But it's still important to keep in mind that many people with ADHD enjoy fulfilling and successful lives. Some even tout the benefits of the condition.