

# ADHD

## What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which is also called ADHD, is a group of behaviors related to ability to concentrate and also to highly active, often impulsive actions that interfere with daily life and with completing age appropriate tasks.

Some people who have been diagnosed with ADHD experience both kinds of issues; others have only the attention problems or only the very high levels of activity, or problems with managing impulsive behaviors. Both children and adults can have ADHD. It is the most commonly diagnosed behavior problem in children. About 3-7% of school-age children are diagnosed with ADHD. About four times as many boys as girls have an ADHD diagnosis. About 50% of children diagnosed with ADHD also have a learning disability.

A child diagnosed with ADHD shows many of the following behaviors in two or more settings (for example, home and school) for at least six months:

- Trouble paying attention and concentrating
- Difficulty organizing activities
- Distractibility, which may interfere with completing tasks, including homework
- High activity level, possibly including difficulty sitting still
- Impulsivity, acting without thinking
- Difficulty or inability to wait for a turn
- Often talks excessively, and may frequently interrupt others

These behaviors may be expectable at young ages and many children will continue to demonstrate some of these behaviors on some occasions. Parents should consider that children mature at different rates and have different personalities, temperaments, and energy levels. Most children get distracted, act impulsively, and struggle to concentrate at one time or another. Sometimes, these relatively normal issues may be mistaken for ADHD. Concern arises when the behaviors are no longer age-appropriate, and are frequent, even dominant. It is also important to distinguish between distractibility and interferences with concentration that may occasionally occur due to fatigue, illness, stress or other factors and true ADHD. ADHD occurs persistently and across situations. An evaluation for ADHD can be done by your pediatrician, a child psychologist or a child psychiatrist.

ADHD that is not adequately assessed and treated has been associated with:

- School performance below capability, including failing tests and classes

**Source:** <http://www.mhwestchester.org/content/adhd>

- Difficulty getting along with other children and with adults
- Difficulties with family members
- Being hurt more often than other children due to impulsive behavior
- Low self-esteem, depression and anxiety

In adulthood, these issues may be associated with difficulties in the work place, inappropriate behavior and violations of law.

## What causes Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?

Many factors appear to impact ADHD. ADHD runs in families - about half of the parents who experience ADHD as children have a child who has ADHD, suggesting a genetic component. Some research connects ADHD to influences during pregnancy. Other research has found differences in the way the brains of children with ADHD work, suggesting factors of brain chemistry. Behaviors associated with ADHD such as difficulty with attention and concentration may be due to the experience of trauma.

## How can Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Be Treated?

There are effective treatments for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The first step is a complete evaluation by your pediatrician, a child psychiatrist or a child psychologist. There is no “test” for ADHD. The evaluation includes a careful history, diagnostic interviews of the child and the parents, and questionnaires about the child’s behavior in multiple settings completed by the child’s teachers and parents.

The two main kinds of treatments for ADHD are medications (also called pharmacological treatments) and behavior therapies.

Current medications do not cure ADHD. Rather, they are used to manage the symptoms. The medications most often used are called “stimulants”. Despite the name, children who truly have ADHD will appear calmer and their ability to focus and learn will improve. Adding behavioral therapy, counseling, and practical support can help children with ADHD and their families to better cope with everyday problems.

A combination of medications and behavior therapies is usually the most effective way to treat ADHD.

## Additional Information About Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

### **CHADD Online (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder)**

<http://www.chadd.org>

CHADD is the largest national organization for ADHD. It was founded by in 1987 by parents of children with ADHD. This site has thorough and easy-to-read information for parents about ADHD in children, as well as information about ADHD in adults. It also gives information about the educational rights of children with ADHD. The telephone number for CHADD is 954-587-3700.

### **National Institute of Mental Health**

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

NIMH is an agency of the United States government. This site has clear information about mental health conditions and provides information on how individuals and family members can recognize symptoms and get the help they need.

### **Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon**

**General** <http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/ps/access/NNBBHS.pdf>

This site contains the report from the U.S. Surgeon General on Mental Health published in December 1999. Chapter Three, which is on Children's Mental Health, has a section on ADHD. This section gives a good summary of the issues related to the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD, including a lot of information on medications, different kinds of behavioral treatments and treatment controversies.