

About adult ADHD

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a condition often associated with children. In some cases, the condition is not diagnosed at all in a child, and the adult ends up being unaware that he or she has the disorder.

Many children continue to experience ADHD as adults. Research shows that between one-half and two-thirds of children with ADHD will continue to have ADHD symptoms as adults.

The major symptoms—impulsivity, hyperactivity, and distractibility—make it difficult to manage everyday tasks such as getting organized, performing on the job and keeping appointments. So it's important to be aware of the possible presence of adult ADHD.

Symptoms

There are three general groups of ADHD symptoms:

- **Attention problems, such as:**

- Making careless mistakes
- Misplacing or losing things
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty paying attention in tasks or activities
- Difficulty following instructions
- Difficulty finishing tasks

- **Hyperactivity, such as:**

- Constant moving of hands and feet, squirming, or problems sitting still
- Leaving meetings, classes and other situations before they end
- Talking fast and talking a lot

- **Impulsivity, such as:**

- Blurting out statements before others are finished talking
- Intruding into conversations when uninvited to do so
- Difficulty waiting in lines.

As individuals move from childhood to adulthood, their primary difficulties may change somewhat, and unlike children who have ADHD, adults may complain of:

- Poor performance at work, loss of jobs or changing jobs frequently
- Inability to complete daily chores
- Relationship problems with spouses, children or friends
- Accidents while driving, working or socializing.



Adults may not show outward signs of hyperactivity, but they may complain of feeling restless or unable to relax.

Diagnosis

A diagnosis of adult ADHD should be made by a mental health professional or physician with expertise in the area of attention dysfunction. Factors in the diagnosis often include a developmental history (reviewing the individual's history of behavioral, social and academic problems); a physical exam and lab tests; a behavioral health evaluation to rule out mental health conditions (such as major depression, bipolar disorder, substance abuse and anxiety disorders); reports from family or friends; and self-reports from the person being evaluated.

Treatment

Treatment for adult ADHD can include medication, psychotherapy and supporting services.

• Medications

- *Stimulants.* These are the most common types of medicine for ADHD. Studies show that about two-thirds of adults with ADHD who are given these medications show significant improvement. Side effects are relatively mild, though difficulties with medication compliance can occur if patients forget to take their medicine.
- *Atomoxetine.* This is a non-stimulant medication used to treat ADHD.

- *Antidepressants.* These are usually tried when the other two types of medicines fail to reduce ADHD symptoms.

• Psychotherapies

- *Cognitive behavioral therapy* with a mental health professional helps change thinking patterns associated with ADHD, and builds coping and stress management skills.
- *Marriage and family therapy* includes spouses and/or other family members to address problems in relationships that may be related to ADHD (such as money problems, making family decisions without talking to the family and forgetting to take care of responsibilities at home).

• Other services

- *Support groups.* These groups include people who are going through similar challenges. Each group is different. You may need to try a few before you find the group that is best for you. Visit www.chadd.org and look under Support/Resource Directory to find a support group in your area.
- *Coaching.* Behavioral coaching helps people with ADHD learn practical skills such as organizing, prioritizing, managing time and managing money. To find a coach, visit the American Coaches Association's website at www.americoach.org.



Tips for managing ADHD

The following are some strategies that may help make your day more manageable.

- Take your medication exactly as directed. Tell your doctor if you don't think it is helping. Sometimes it takes several trials of different medications and medication combinations to find the one that works best.
- Use reminders. Use daily planners and reminders/timers with alarms, and leave notes to yourself, to help stay on task. Also, there are many free or low-cost smartphone apps on the market that help people with ADHD remember things, stay organized and concentrate.
- Follow a routine. It helps to do things like waking up, eating, and going to sleep at the same time each day.
- Get organized. Use labeled containers or bins to store similar items that you use.
- Don't put things off if you can do them right now. For example, return phone calls right after you retrieve messages and file papers immediately after you open mail. This prevents clutter and confusion.
- Keep up with exercise. Even a little exercise can help improve your mood, attention and energy. It can also help you sleep better and provide extra structure to your day.
- Limit stimulation if possible. Reduced stimulation helps keep symptoms in control. Plan quiet times to relax, and avoid loud noises and bright lights when you can.
- Follow healthy habits. Eat a healthy diet low in sugar and salt. Avoid alcohol, drugs, and too much caffeine.

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