



Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder

Does your child have trouble paying attention?

Does he or she talk nonstop or have trouble staying still?

Does your child have a hard time controlling his or her behavior?

For some children, these may be symptoms of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD.

Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder

What is attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD?

ADHD is a common mental disorder that begins in childhood and can continue through adolescence and adulthood. It makes it hard for a child to focus and pay attention. Some children may be hyperactive or have trouble being patient. For children with ADHD, levels of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsive behaviors are greater than for other children in their age group. ADHD can make it hard for a child to do well in school or behave at home or in the community.

ADHD can be treated. Doctors and specialists can help.

Who can develop ADHD?

Children of all backgrounds can have ADHD. Teens and adults can have ADHD too.

What causes ADHD?

No one knows for sure. ADHD probably stems from interactions between genes and environmental or non-genetic factors.

ADHD often runs in families. Researchers have found that much of the risk of having ADHD has to do with genes. Many genes are linked to ADHD, and each gene plays a small role in the disorder. ADHD is very complex and a genetic test for diagnosing the disorder is not yet available.

Among the non-genetic factors that may increase a child's risk for developing ADHD are:

- **Smoking or drinking** during pregnancy
- **Birth complications** or very low birth weight
- **Exposure to lead** or other toxic substances
- **Extreme neglect**, abuse, or social deprivation.

Some studies suggest that **artificial food additives and dyes** may worsen hyperactivity and inattention, but these effects are small and do not account for most cases of ADHD.

What are the symptoms of ADHD?

ADHD has many symptoms. Some symptoms at first may look like normal behaviors for a child, but ADHD makes them much worse and occur more often. Children with ADHD have at least six symptoms that start in the first 12 years of their lives.

Children with ADHD may:

- Get distracted easily and forget things often
- Switch too quickly from one activity to the next
- Have trouble with directions
- Daydream too much
- Have trouble finishing tasks like homework or chores
- Lose toys, books, and school supplies often
- Fidget and squirm a lot
- Talk nonstop and interrupt people
- Run around a lot
- Touch and play with everything they see
- Be very impatient
- Blurt out inappropriate comments
- Have trouble controlling their emotions.

How do I know if my child has ADHD?

Your child's doctor may make a diagnosis. Or sometimes the doctor may refer you to a mental health specialist who is more experienced with ADHD to make a diagnosis.

There is no single test that can tell if your child has ADHD. To make a diagnosis, the doctor or specialist will examine your child and use several rating scales to track ADHD symptoms. The specialist will also collect information from you, your family, and your child's teachers.

Sometimes it can be hard to diagnose a child with ADHD because symptoms may look like other problems. For example, a child may seem quiet and well-behaved, but in fact he or she is having a hard time paying attention and is often distracted. Or, a child may act badly in school, but teachers don't realize that the child has ADHD.

If your child is having trouble at school or at home and has been for a long time, ask his or her doctor about ADHD.

How do children with ADHD get better?

Children with ADHD can get better with treatment, but there is no cure. There are three basic types of treatment:

- 1. Medication.** Several medications can help. The most common types are called stimulants. Medications help children focus, learn, and stay calm.

Sometimes medications cause side effects, such as sleep problems or stomachaches. Your child may need to try a few medications to see which one works best. It's important that you and your doctor watch your child closely while he or she is taking medicine.
- 2. Therapy.** There are different kinds of therapy. Behavioral therapy can help teach children to control their behavior so they can do better at school and at home.
- 3. Medication and therapy combined.** Many children do well with both medication and therapy.

How can I help my child?

Give your child guidance and understanding. A specialist can show you how to help your child make positive changes. Supporting your child helps everyone in your family. Also, talk to your child's teachers. Some children with ADHD can get special education services.





How does ADHD affect teens?

Being a teenager isn't always easy. Teens with ADHD can have a tough time. While hyperactivity tends to get better as a child becomes a teen, problems with inattention, disorganization, and poor impulse control often continue through the teen years and into adulthood. School may be a struggle, and some teens take too many risks or break rules. But like children with ADHD, teens can improve with treatment.

What can I do for my teen with ADHD?

Support your teen. Set clear rules for him or her to follow. Try not to punish your teen every time he or she breaks the rules. Let your teen know you can help.

Can adults have ADHD too?

ADHD can continue into adulthood. Like ADHD in children and teens, ADHD in adults can make life challenging. ADHD can make it hard for adults to feel organized, stick with a job, or get to work on time. Adults with ADHD may have trouble in relationships. The disorder can also make adults feel restless.

ADHD in adults can be diagnosed and treated. For some adults, finding out they have ADHD can be a big relief. Being able to connect ADHD to longtime problems helps adults understand that they can get better. If you're an adult and think you may have ADHD symptoms, call your doctor.



Where can I find more information?

To learn more about attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, visit:

MedlinePlus (National Library of Medicine):

<http://medlineplus.gov>

(En Español: <http://medlineplus.gov/spanish>)

For information on clinical trials, visit:

ClinicalTrials.gov: <http://www.clinicaltrials.gov>

For more information on conditions that affect mental health, resources, and research, go to **MentalHealth.gov** at <http://www.mentalhealth.gov>, the **NIMH website** at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>, or contact us at:

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National Institute
of Mental Health

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES**

National Institutes of Health

NIH Publication No. TR 13-3572

Revised 2013

