

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a brain-based disorder affecting about 1 in 10 children.

Children with ADHD may:

- Have trouble paying attention and/or controlling impulsive behaviors (e.g., acting without thinking about results)
- Be overly active

ADHD often is:

- Noticed during early childhood
- Diagnosed when a child is 5 years or older

Symptoms continue into adulthood for more than half of children diagnosed with ADHD, though hyperactivity tends to decrease over time.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends healthcare providers ask parents, teachers and other adults who care for the child about the child's behavior in different settings, like at home, school or with peers.

Signs and symptoms of ADHD:

- Daydreaming
- Difficulty getting along with others
- Forgetting or losing things often
- Trouble paying attention
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity
- Making careless mistakes or taking unnecessary risks
- Squirming or fidgeting
- Talking too much
- Trouble waiting their turn

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The 3 types of ADHD and their effects on individuals:

- **Predominantly Inattentive Presentation:**

- Becoming easily distracted
- Difficulty in organizing or finishing a task
- Difficulty paying attention to details or following instructions or conversations
- Forgetting details of daily routines

- **Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation:**

- Excessive fidgeting
- Excessive talking
- Difficulty sitting still for long—for example, during a meal or while doing homework. Smaller children may run, jump or climb constantly.
- Restlessness and impulsivity. For example, an individual may interrupt others frequently, grab things from people or speak at inappropriate times. It is hard for the individual to wait their turn or listen to directions. Individuals with impulsivity may suffer more accidents and injuries than is usual.

- **Combined Presentation:** Symptoms of the above two types of ADHD are equally present in the individual.

Causes and diagnosis

ADHD is a complex disorder, the result of many interacting genes and, most importantly, the result of genes interacting with the environment. As a result, there is no single test to diagnose ADHD. Diagnosis involves taking into consideration an array of criteria or symptoms.

Possible causes and risk factors include:

- Alcohol and tobacco use during pregnancy
- Brain injury
- Exposure to environmental risks (e.g., lead) during pregnancy or at a young age
- Low birth weight
- Premature delivery

Diagnosing ADHD usually includes a checklist for rating ADHD symptoms and taking a history of the child from parents, teachers and, sometimes, the child. One step of the process involves having a medical exam, including **hearing** and **vision tests**, to rule out other problems with symptoms similar to those of ADHD.

Psychiatrists, pediatricians, neurologists, psychologists, clinical social workers, nurse practitioners and licensed counselors or therapists can diagnose ADHD.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) criteria for diagnosing ADHD →

Treatment

ADHD is treated through a variety of approaches, such as medical, educational, behavioral and psychological. This “multimodal” approach depends on the person’s age and may include parent training, medication, skills training, counseling, behavioral therapy and classroom interventions.

CDC ADHD Treatment →

Information about adult ADHD

ADHD often lasts into adulthood. For more information on adult ADHD, visit the **National Resource Center on ADHD** and the **National Institutes of Mental Health**.

References

“ADHD Fact Sheets,” Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD), accessed Nov. 21, 2022, <https://chadd.org/>.

“What is ADHD?” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), accessed Nov. 21, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/facts.html>.

“Symptoms and Diagnosis of ADHD,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), accessed Nov. 21, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/diagnosis.html>.