



ADHD

Attention Deficit
Hyperactivity Disorder





Every child gets restless and fidgety from time to time; in particular, boys are often bursting with energy that's hard to harness and control. It is common for kids to drift into daydreams when they should be paying attention. Many seem a bit disorganized and forgetful. Some have outbursts of temper. But attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is more than being jumpy or spacey. It's an important medical disorder that makes it hard for children to learn and disrupts social growth and family life.

What is ADHD?

Doctors call it a *neuropsychiatric disorder*. This means problems in the brain cause abnormal patterns of behavior. Symptoms of ADHD usually begin to appear at age 3 or 4 and get steadily worse. Being hyper and impulsive peaks at age 6 or 7; hyperactivity usually settles down in the teenage years, but impulsive behavior can last into adulthood. Problems paying attention peak a little later, often at age 8 or 9, and may last throughout life.

The 3 main types of ADHD are:

- The **inattentive type** accounts for about 50% of all cases.
- The **hyperactive-impulsive type** accounts for about 25% of all cases.
- The **combined type** includes symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. It is the most obvious form of ADHD, and often includes disruptive and aggressive behavior. **About 25% of children with ADHD have the combined type.**

(See page 4 for behaviors specific to each type of ADHD.)

Does My Child Have ADHD?

Since every child will be fidgety, jumpy, forgetful, disruptive, or spacey from time to time, many parents need the help of their pediatrician or family doctor to answer this question. Still, by asking yourself a few simple questions, you can decide if your child needs to be evaluated.

If you are worried about ADHD, ask yourself and your child's teachers:

- Is your child happy in school and learning at grade level?
- Is he or she making friends and getting along well with other children?
- Does your child listen to directions and complete age-appropriate tasks?
- Is your child happy at home?
- Does he or she get along well with the family?

Children who have major problems in these areas should be checked for ADHD.



Traits of ADHD

The behaviors of each type of ADHD fall into three groups, each has certain symptoms:



Inattention

- Being **easily distracted** and skipping from one activity to another
- Having a **hard time staying “on task”** to complete schoolwork or chores
- Having trouble listening to and following directions
- Appearing “spacey”
- Being **disorganized and forgetful**
- Losing things and **making careless mistakes**
- **Falling behind in school** despite normal IQ

Hyperactivity

- Having **excess energy**; acting “wound up” and “always on the go”
- **Fidgeting and squirming**; jumping up and running about when it’s not appropriate
- Having **trouble with quiet activities**
- **Talking too much**
- **Needing to stay busy**, often trying to do several things at once

Impulsivity

- Being **impatient** and unable to wait their turn
- **Grabbing toys from others**
- **Blurting out and interrupting others**
- **Acting before thinking**

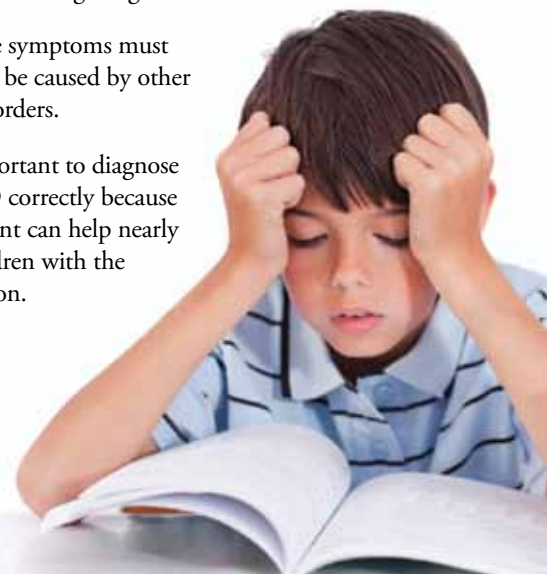


Diagnosing ADHD

A diagnosis of ADHD depends on the presence of the traits listed on page 4. But for the symptoms to add up to ADHD, they must meet these standards:

- The problems must have begun before age 7
- The symptoms must be present in more than one setting, such as at school and home
- The symptoms must last for at least 6 months
- The symptoms must interfere with acceptable progress in school or in social adjustment
- The symptoms must be excessive for the child’s age and stage of growth
- The symptoms must not be caused by other disorders.

It’s important to diagnose ADHD correctly because treatment can help nearly all children with the condition.



Treating ADHD

Treating ADHD usually requires medication. You should discuss the pros and cons of treatment for your child with your doctors. To decide if medication is right, your doctors should evaluate your child's overall health and possible side effect risk factors.

Three groups of medications are approved for ADHD in children:

Methylphenidate and *amphetamines* are stimulants that have been used for over 50 years. *Atomoxetine* is a non-stimulant that is used.

All 3 drugs work on similar chemical pathways in the brain. Each is available in short-, medium-, and long-acting dosages.

Behavioral treatments are also effective and range from psychotherapy and counseling to social skills training, support groups, and parent skills training. Some helpful tips are:

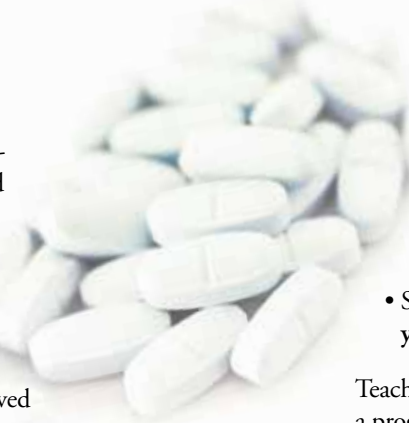
- **Keep to a simple daily schedule** with regular times for meals, homework, chores, TV, etc
- **Give breaks** during long or tough activities such as reading or sitting through religious services
- **Reduce distractions**
- **Limit TV watching;** promote physical games and activities
- **Set goals** that are easy to achieve and reward your child for achieving them
- **Encourage activities** your child is likely to succeed at
- **Provide checklists** that your child can use to stay on track
- Use notebook and homework organizers

- **Organize your child's room**, putting books, toys, and clothes in their place
- Remove your child from **situations that trigger outbursts**
- When discipline is required, **use time outs**
- Stick to your rules and schedules, but **always give your child lots of support and love**

Teachers and school administrators should help plan a program to help children with ADHD do well in school. Children may need extra monitoring, extra time to complete tasks, or special instructions.

Living with ADHD

ADHD is a common disorder that can cause serious problems in learning, social development, and family life. Although it is a long-term problem that can't be cured, ADHD usually responds well to a program that features the careful use of medication along with behavioral, social, and educational supports. It's a good example of how teamwork between families, doctors, and educators can help children thrive.





Learn more about ADHD,
visit the Patient Education Center
at www.patientedu.org/adhd.

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