

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder



1919 University Avenue West, Suite 400, St. Paul, MN 55104 Tel. 651-645-2948 or 888-NAMIHELPS www.namihelps.org

People with ADHD may have a hard time paying attention, sitting still for a long time, or making impulse decisions. ADHD is common and is often diagnosed in childhood (about 9% of children between 3-17), although many people with ADHD may not be diagnosed until they are adults. ADHD affects an estimated two million American children, an average of at least one child in every U.S. classroom.

Types of ADHD

There are three types of ADHD. A diagnosis of ADHD happens when at least six of the following signs occur, with some having started before a person is seven. Serious difficulties in at least two settings, such as home, school or work, must also happen. Each type has its own signs and are explained below:

While some behaviors associated with ADHD are normal, someone with ADHD will have trouble controlling these behaviors and will show them much more frequently.

- Inattentive type, who often:
 - Have a hard time paying attention to detail
 - Make careless mistakes in schoolwork, or fail to finish things
 - Have a hard time organizing, loses things easily
 - Are forgetful or easily distracted, may not seem to listen when spoken to
- Hyperactive/impulsive type, who often:
 - Fidget with their hands or squirm in their seat.
 - Have a hard time doing things quietly.
 - Blur out answers, have difficulty waiting their turn
 - Are always 'on the go'
- Combined type. This is the most common type of ADHD. It is a mix of the first and second type.

What are the causes?

Like many other illnesses, many things can cause ADHD, such as:

- Genes
- Cigarette, alcohol, or drug use during pregnancy
- Experience with environmental toxins during pregnancy, or at a young age
- Low birth weight
- Brain injuries

Diagnosis

Getting an ADHD diagnosis can be hard because the many signs of ADHD are like typical behavior in most young children. Teachers are often the first to notice symptoms because they see children in a learning environment with children the same age every day. There is no one single test that can diagnose a child with ADHD, so meet with a doctor or mental health professional. They will rule out any other causes.

Is ADHD associated with other disorders?

Yes, and signs of ADHD may be misdiagnosed or happen at the same time as other disorders. A few of these can be:

- Oppositional Defiant Disorder, which is characterized by negative, defiant behavior
- Conduct Disorder, which is characterized by serious rule breaking or aggression towards others
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Communication or Learning Disabilities
- Tourette' Syndrome, which is characterized by motor and verbal tic.

Treatment

Each person with ADHD will benefit from having their own treatment plan. Treatment plans can include:

- Medication, such as stimulants, non-stimulants, or antidepressants.
- Behavioral Therapy, creating structure, routine, and clear expectations as well as social skills (like sharing and playing with others).
- Caregiver Support, such as using positive reinforcement ("I noticed that you waited to take your turn, great job!")

Other Approaches

Many families and individuals prefer not to use medications, or they find that medication/therapy can be supported with the following approaches:

- Providing step by step instructions
- Breaking long assignments into smaller chunks
- Focusing on and rewarding good behavior
- Finding time for breaks for exercise or play
- Find helpful work adjustments (standing desks, resistance bands, walks, etc.)
- Request a 504 or IEP plan in school
- Use of fidget toys or chewing gum to help with focus
- Work with professionals to learn calming techniques and breathing exercises
- Being patient and understanding
- Eliminating sugar, artificially added flavors, or colors in food
- Adding nutritional supplements (like omega-3's)
- Neurofeedback (EEG biofeedback)