



ADHD: Symptoms and Treatment

Guide for Adult Patients and Loved Ones

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, more commonly known as ADHD, is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. A person with ADHD might struggle to concentrate on tasks for extended periods of time or regulate their thoughts and actions. They might have trouble adhering to strict schedules or could have a tendency to say or do things at socially inappropriate times.

It is estimated that approximately 1 in 22 adults suffer from ADHD. The disorder usually begins in childhood, with a typical onset between ages 4–17. However, research suggests that up to 80% of all adults with ADHD have never been diagnosed. Untreated ADHD can cause significant challenges in an individual's personal and professional life, frequently resulting in career instability, financial difficulties, and other mental health disorders like depression and anxiety.

Types and Symptoms

There are three different types of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Inattentive type, Hyperactive/Impulsive type, and Combined type. In order for someone to be diagnosed with ADHD, five or more of the symptoms below must be present, and these symptoms must cause problems in at least two of the following areas: home, work/school, and social settings.

➤ ADHD – Inattentive type

- Fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes
- Has difficulty holding attention
- Does not appear to listen when spoken to
- Struggles to follow through on instructions and tasks
- Has difficulty with organization
- Avoids or does not like tasks requiring sustained mental effort
- Loses things easily
- Is easily distracted
- Is forgetful in daily activities

➤ ADHD — Hyperactive/Impulsive type

- Fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in chair
- Has difficulty sitting still for extended periods
- Feels restless or has a desire to move around at inappropriate times
- Has difficulty engaging in quiet activities
- Acts as if driven by a motor or is always “on the go”
- Talks excessively
- Blurts out answers to incomplete questions or finishes others’ sentences
- Has difficulty waiting, such as in lines or queues
- Interrupts or intrudes upon others

➤ ADHD — Combined type

- Individual meets both sets of inattention and hyperactive/impulsive criteria

Treatments

ADHD is very treatable, and even adults who have been struggling with undiagnosed ADHD for years can improve their quality of life. They just need some help managing their disorder.

➤ Medication

Just as you might need glasses to help your eyes focus properly, a person with ADHD may need psychiatric medications to help them focus on tasks, ignore distractions, and refrain from acting on impulses.

ADHD is typically treated with either stimulants, non-stimulants, or antidepressants. Although each type of medication works differently, they all increase the levels of the neurotransmitters dopamine and/or norepinephrine in the brain, which in turn helps to regulate impulsive behavior and improve attention span.

Stimulants are the most commonly prescribed medication for ADHD, as they have been shown to improve symptoms in 70–80% of individuals.

➤ Therapy and Skills Training

Professional therapy and counseling are important components of treatment for many people with ADHD. Treatments like individual therapy, group therapy, and skills training are important for helping individuals learn how to manage symptoms of ADHD.

Some common therapeutic practices include:

- Teaching you techniques to help with organization.
- Helping you identify ways to stop, think, and then react to situations.

- Teaching you about ADHD and how your behaviors may be perceived by others.
- Talking about the way you think about yourself and how these thoughts make you feel. When talking about these thoughts, the therapist may be able to help change them and help you feel and act differently.
- Setting small goals with you in order to track progress and behaviors.
- Encouraging you to pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and to connect those to mood states.
- Helping you monitor your behaviors and become more aware of how you react to certain situations.
- Praise and reinforcement of positive behaviors and progress.
- Teaching you how to manage anger and other feelings of hostility or irritability.
- Discussing your talents or working on improving old and new skills you have.

Supporting a Loved One with ADHD

If you know someone who has ADHD or whom you suspect may have ADHD, then you might be looking for ways to help and support them through their disorder. Family members, friends, and other supporters can be great sources of strength for individuals living with ADHD.

The following section includes tips that can be helpful for supporting someone with ADHD. Keep in mind they might not all be right for you and your loved one, but it could be useful to give them a try.

Educate yourself

Stay informed about what ADHD is, what it looks like, and how it can affect your loved one. Encourage them to become educated about ADHD if they have not done so already.

Express your support

Let your loved one know that you care about them, are concerned for their well-being, and are there to support them. This can help quiet any doubts they may have and reassure them that you are on their side.

Advocate for treatment

Ask your loved one if they are seeking help for their disorder. If they are not, express to them why you think professional treatment could be helpful. Offer to help them find treatment if they would like you to.

Listen

Ask how your loved one is feeling, and listen to what they tell you. Don't try to guide the conversation too much or downplay their challenges. Sometimes people just need to be heard, and they will notice whether or not you are truly listening.

Offer to help with tasks

Ask your loved one if there are any daily tasks or obligations you can assist with. This can be helpful if their disorder makes certain tasks difficult for them, or if they are short on time because of their treatment schedule.

Give them space

Give your loved one space when they need it. Do not push them to talk about their disorder or treatment if they don't want to. Avoid prying into intimate details if they seem reluctant to share with you. Respect their emotional boundaries.

Involve them in plans

Invite your loved one to join in social events and gatherings, either with a group or just between the two of you. Continue to socialize with them as you have in the past. This will help reassure them that your relationship has not changed because of their disorder.

Treat them with respect

Your loved one has not changed just because they are experiencing a mental health disorder. They are still the same person they were before. Treat them with the same respect and dignity you would anyone else, and do not patronize or talk down to them.

Take care of yourself

Your well-being matters just as much as your loved one's. Know your limits and seek support if you need it. Join support groups, check out community services, and seek professional guidance if you think it would be helpful. Don't let your whole life revolve around your loved one's condition.

Don't make assumptions

Even if you know a lot about ADHD, do not make assumptions about your loved one's experiences. Ask questions and seek to understand their situation rather than telling them what to do.

Don't criticize or blame

Criticizing your loved one's behavior or blaming them for their situation will not help anyone. Be supportive in any way possible, and understand that they did not choose the challenges they are experiencing.

Celebrate their progress

Let your loved one know that you are proud of their progress both in and out of treatment. Celebrate their "wins" and successes in recovery. Encourage them to keep going!

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