

ADHD

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common neurobehavioral disorders of children and adolescents. It also affects an estimated 4.4 percent of adults in the United States in a given year. Symptoms include difficulty staying focused and paying attention, difficulty controlling behavior, and very high levels of activity.

ADHD is the leading cause of referrals to mental health professionals and special education programs, as well as the juvenile justice system.

Symptoms of ADHD:

It is normal for children, at one time or another, to have trouble focusing and behaving. However, in children with ADHD, the symptoms continue instead of getting better and they can make learning difficult.

ADHD can only be identified by watching for specific behaviors, which vary from person to person. The most common behaviors fall into three categories: impulsivity, inattention, and hyperactivity.

Signs of Impulsivity:

- » Blurts out answers before questions have been completed
- » Has difficulty waiting in line for a turn
- » Interrupts or intrudes on others

Signs of Inattention:

- » Fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes on schoolwork, work or other activities
- » Difficulty sustaining attention in tasks
- » Appears apathetic, unmotivated to complete tasks
- » Avoids tasks which require sustained mental effort such as homework
- » Losing or forgetting items like toys, books, pencils, and tools needed for a task
- » Easily distracted by irrelevant sights and sound
- » Forgetful in daily activities
- » Appears preoccupied

Signs of Hyperactivity:

- » Fidgets with hands and feet or squirms in seat
- » Leaves seat in classroom or other situations in which remaining seated is expected
- » Often runs about or climbs excessively in situations in which it is inappropriate
- » Difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly
- » Is often "on the go" or acts as if "driven by a motor"
- » Often talks excessively

ADHD *continued*

Facts about ADHD:

- » Affects 3 to 5 percent of all children
- » ADHD is 5 to 7 times more common in boys
- » Tends to run in families; has an association with a family history of alcoholism and/or depression
- » There is some suggestion clinically that asthma may be more prevalent in ADHD children
- » ADHD children often show considerable artistic ability, but may have difficulty forming symbols (writing)

Evaluation and Treatment:

Due to the complexity of ADHD and its potential effects on a child's development, identifying and diagnosing the disorder is not simple. Evaluators should use multiple sources of information to find out how the child functions in different areas of development including all three dimensions of ADHD (inattention, hyperactivity, impulsivity). Parents, teachers and those with concerns and knowledge about the child should be involved in the assessment.

Once the assessment has been completed, it is important to draw upon a unique intervention plan designed especially for the child. This may include a combination of classroom interventions, instructional strategies, environmental structuring, behavior management approaches, counseling and medication.

Coping Strategies for Teens and Adults with ADHD:

- » When necessary, ask the teacher or boss to repeat instructions
- » Break large assignments into small, simple tasks
- » Keep a calendar or daily planner with a list of things you need to do that day.
- » Work in a quiet area – give yourself short breaks
- » Create a routine – get yourself ready for school or work at the same time and in the same way everyday
- » Exercise, eat a balanced diet and get plenty of sleep

Learn more: CHADD – The National Resource on ADHD (<http://www.chadd.org>)