

Adult ADHD

Attention Deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a common disorder that affects 1 in 10 children and often continues into adulthood.

Adults with ADHD may not have been diagnosed as a child but may have had lifelong struggles with:

- Attention
- Organization
- Impulse
- Other areas

ADHD's origins are biological and genetic, and ADHD often runs in families.

Symptoms

Adults with ADHD have a hard time with sustained attention, inhibition, and maintaining motivation. Therefore, they have trouble following through with plans to reach a goal. An adult with ADHD may show one or more of these symptoms:

Inattention

- Easily distracted, mind wanders.
- Misses or forgets important details.
- Work may be sloppy or careless.
- Starts projects but does not finish.

Hyperactivity

- Frequently moving while seated.
- Physically and mentally restless.
- Appears "on the go".

Impulsive

- Trouble holding back behavior or comments.
- Trouble listening to others.
- Acts without thinking.

Other Disorders

It is common for adults with ADHD to also:

- Experience anxiety
- Depression
- Autism
- Spectrum disorder
- Other learning disorders
- Addictions
- Tic disorders

The Biggest Problem

People with ADHD show difficulty at the **point of performance**. They know what to do but have trouble getting themselves to do it and/or maintain it over time.

Challenges

Adults with ADHD often struggle with:

- Time management.
- Delaying satisfaction to achieve long term goals.
- Educational/academic underachievement.
- Managing finances.
- Job instability and keeping employment.
- Controlling emotions and showing sympathy.
- Marriage satisfaction, partner relationships.
- Peer relationships.

Diagnosing ADHD

ADHD may be diagnosed through a combination of assessment tools including:

- Clinical interview
- Self-report and collateral questionnaires.
- Psychiatric or psychological evaluation.
- Ask your doctor for more information.

Treatment Plan

There are many ways to address adult ADHD. These include medicines, individual and couples therapy and develop strategies and systems.

Usually, a combination of therapies is most effective. It is important to work with your doctor to develop the best approach for you. This may take some trial and error.

Medicines

There are many medicines that may be prescribed. One type of medicine found to be effective in most patients are called **stimulants**. These medicines help people with ADHD improve focus, sustain attention, and control impulsive behavior. However, they may not be good for patients who have heart problems. Patients taking stimulants **do not** get “high”. Other non-stimulant medicines are also available.

Your doctor or psychiatrist will help find the medicine or combination of medicines and the dose that work best for you. While you are taking medicines, it is important to have regular check-ups with your doctor or psychiatrist to track how well it is working. It is important not to share your medicines with others.

Behavior Therapy

Behavior therapy helps patients develop strategies to optimally address areas of difficulties. These may include:

- Dividing large tasks into smaller parts and finish one part at a time.
- Schedule breaks after 20-30 minutes.
- Work with music in the background.
- Giving yourself “rewards” when one task is complete.
- Use checklists to track tasks.
- Offering yourself self-compassion.

Systems

People with ADHD benefit from using systems to assist with complex or repeated tasks. These could include:

- Setting bills on automatic bill pay.
- Use a medicine box with alarms.
- Use both a planner and a shared calendar with alarms.
- Use automatic oral reminders.
- Use navigation devices when driving.
- Develop structured schedules and routines.
- Ensure self-responsibility, avoid excuses.

Factors that Contribute to Success:

- Accept that your brain works differently.
- Engage in activities you do well and that bring you joy and satisfaction.
- Exercise regularly, at least 3x weekly.
- Counseling to manage mood issues.
- Couples counseling to develop communication and other strategies to help optimize interactions with your partner.
- Avoid excessive alcohol.
- Regular sleep routine, plenty of rest.
- Avoid too much gaming, internet use.
- Meditation.
- Avoid overload.

Many people with ADHD are successful. Individual success usually depends on using strategies and systems that work well for you and your family.

For more information:

<https://chadd.org/for-adults/overview/>

<http://www.russellbarkley.org/>

https://www.aafp.org/dam/AAFP/documents/patient_care/adhd_toolkit/adhd19-patient-handout.pdf

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 11/2023 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8312.