

Understanding Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

About Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common childhood disorders affecting an estimated 5.4 million children—about one in ten—in the United States.^{1,2} The criteria for the disorder require symptoms to appear before the age of seven; the disorder is more than twice as common in boys as girls.^{2,3} Up to 65% of children with ADHD continue to have symptoms into adulthood.⁴

Signs and Symptoms of ADHD

ADHD is classified into three different subtypes that are determined by the symptoms exhibited:³

- **Predominantly Inattentive Type**—these children may be easily distracted or forgetful, have difficulty completing tasks, struggle with homework or lose school materials, daydream and appear not to listen, or may have more trouble following directions than others³
- **Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type**—those with hyperactive symptoms may fidget, talk nonstop or be in constant motion; impulsivity symptoms include being very impatient, making inappropriate comments, an inability to restrain emotions, or interrupting others' conversations or activities^{3,4}
- **Combined Type**—categorized by both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive symptoms³

Causes

The specific causes of ADHD are unknown, however:

- Studies of twins show a strong genetic component of ADHD⁵
- Brain changes have been documented in children with ADHD⁵
- Research suggests that maternal smoking during pregnancy and low birth weight may have a relationship to development of ADHD⁵

The Path to Diagnosis and Evaluation

Parents who think their child has ADHD should speak to a pediatrician or a pediatric mental health specialist.⁶ Their healthcare provider will evaluate the child using the criteria in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR).¹ While there is no single test for ADHD, the specialist will rule out other physical, environmental, learning and psychological conditions before making a diagnosis.⁶

Impact of ADHD

While many children have occasional problems with concentration and behavior, for children with ADHD, these problems are persistent and may interfere with school, home life and relationships.¹ Without appropriate diagnosis and treatment, ADHD could cause serious developmental and learning problems; therefore, early identification of ADHD is beneficial.¹

Managing ADHD

Although there is no cure for ADHD, the disorder can be successfully managed through a multi-modal treatment approach that may include behavior therapy, medication, and parent and child education.⁵

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