

What is ADHD?

ADHD (**attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder**) is a disorder that affects a person's ability to pay attention and control impulsive behaviors. As the name implies, the symptoms of ADHD are organized into two categories: *inattention* and *hyperactivity / impulsivity*.

 Inattention	 Hyperactivity / Impulsivity
✓ has difficulty staying focused on activities ✓ forgetful of tasks (e.g. homework, paying bills) ✓ misses small details / makes careless mistakes ✓ avoids mentally demanding tasks ✓ may seem to not listen when spoken to ✓ often loses things	✓ constantly moving or "on the go" ✓ has difficulty sitting still ✓ excessively talkative ✓ often fidgets, taps fingers, or squirms ✓ has difficulty with quiet tasks ✓ often speaks out of turn / interrupts

Note: Everyone will occasionally experience symptoms similar to those of ADHD. We all forget things, and sometimes work is just plain boring. That's normal. When a professional diagnoses ADHD, they must also consider the intensity, frequency, and consequences of symptoms.

What does ADHD really look like?

During **childhood**, ADHD can be misinterpreted as intentionally "bad" behavior. Children with ADHD struggle to pay attention during school, and they frequently get in trouble for talking or getting out of their chairs. Oftentimes, even peers become frustrated by these behaviors, which can lead to isolation.

During **adulthood**, ADHD can damage careers, relationships, and self-esteem. Inattention symptoms can lead to forgotten responsibilities, poor organization, and difficulty completing tasks. Hyperactivity symptoms manifest as thrill seeking, a high need for stimulation, and impulsive decision-making.

Biological Basis

Some people incorrectly believe that ADHD is made up to serve as an excuse for poor behavior. However, we know that ADHD has a very real biological basis. For example, people with ADHD have structural differences in their brains, most notably in an area that's responsible for impulse control.

We also know that genetics play a role: A person is much more likely to develop ADHD if their parents have the disorder. Some environmental factors also play a role, but to a lesser extent than heredity.

Treatment

Although there's no cure for ADHD, both children and adults can learn to manage their symptoms with medication and psychotherapy.

 Psychotherapy	 Medication
Therapy for ADHD typically focuses on identifying strengths and weaknesses, skill building, and education about ways to reduce the intensity of symptoms. It can be invaluable to work with a therapist to learn <i>personalized</i> coping skills.	Although medication cannot cure ADHD, an effective treatment can help both children and adults with symptom management. The most common medications for ADHD are <i>stimulants</i> .