

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Symptoms and Diagnosis

ADHD is a chronic neurobiological disorder that interferes with an individual's capacity to regulate activity level (hyperactivity), inhibit behavior (impulsivity), and attend to tasks (inattention) in developmentally appropriate ways. Children with ADHD have functional impairment across multiple settings including home, school, and peer relationships. ADHD has also been shown to have long-term adverse effects on academic performance, vocational success, and social-emotional development.

- ADHD affects an estimated 4.1 percent of youths ages 9 to 17
- About 2 to 3 times more boys than girls have ADHD
- ADHD often co-occurs with other problems, such as depressive and anxiety disorders, conduct disorders, drug abuse, or antisocial behavior
- Symptoms of ADHD usually become evident in preschool or early elementary years. The disorder frequently persists into adolescence and into adulthood

What are symptoms of ADHD?

Inattention – People who are inattentive have a hard time keeping their mind on one thing and may get bored with a task after only a few minutes. Completing routine tasks may be difficult.

Hyperactivity – People who are hyperactive always seem to be in motion. They can't sit still; they may dash around or talk incessantly. They may roam around a room, squirm in their seats, wiggle their feet, or touch everything.

Impulsivity – People who are overly impulsive, seem unable to curb their immediate reactions or think before they act. As a result, they may blurt out answers to questions, make it hard for them to wait for things they want or take their turn in games.

How is ADHD diagnosed?

All children may be overly active at times, their attention spans may be short, and they may act without thinking. However, if a child seems more active than others the same age; if a child is notoriously forgetful, disorganized, and always losing things; if the teacher complains that a child can't stay seated, blurts out answers, struggles paying attention, behaves aggressively, or struggles academically, then a child may need to be evaluated for ADHD.

A comprehensive evaluation of the child must be conducted by a licensed mental health counselor to establish a correct diagnosis of ADHD, to rule out other potential causes of the symptoms, and determine the presence or absence of co-occurring conditions. Such an evaluation should include a clinical assessment of the individual's academic, social, and

emotional functioning and developmental abilities. Additional tests may include intelligence testing, measures of attention span, and parent and teacher rating scales. A medical exam by a physician is also important.

DSM IV Diagnosis Criteria are as follows:

Inattention:

- often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other activities
- often has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities
- often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (not due to oppositional behavior or failure to understand instructions)
- often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (such as school work)
- often loses things necessary for tasks or activities (e.g. toys, school assignments, books, etc.)
- is often easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
- is often forgetful in daily activities

Hyperactivity-Impulsivity

- often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
- often leaves seat in classroom or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected
- often runs about or climbs excessively in situations in which it is inappropriate (restlessness)
- often has difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly
- is often “on the go” or often acts as “driven by a motor”
- often talks excessively
- often blurts out answers before questions have been completed
- often has difficulty awaiting turn
- often interrupts or intrudes on others

Information obtained from articles published on www.nih.gov/publicat/adhdqa.cfm, www.chadd.org/faq.htm

Specific articles that may be helpful include:

CHADD: Frequently Asked Questions

Attention Deficit Disorder: Beyond the Myths

Attention Deficit Disorder: Adding Up The Facts

NIHM: ADHD – Questions and Answers