

# The facts about **ATTENTION DEFICIT/ HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER**

## What is ADHD?

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder is a neurobiological disorder. A person with ADHD has a chronic level of inattention, impulsive hyperactivity or both such that daily functioning is compromised. The symptoms of the disorder impact the child's ability to function appropriately in school, at home, and in social situations. ADHD is typically diagnosed in childhood, and between 30-50% of cases persist through adulthood.<sup>(1)(2)</sup>

Research indicates that ADHD has a strong genetic component and tends to run in families. Traumatic injury to the brain's prefrontal cortex can also increase the incidence of the disorder.<sup>(5)</sup> This part of the brain located directly behind the forehead governs our ability to reason, focus, prioritize, and control impulses. Finally, a number of environmental factors have also been identified as ADHD risk factors, including:<sup>(4)(5)</sup>

- Difficulties in pregnancy, such as low-birth weight and premature delivery
- Prenatal smoking
- Prenatal consumption of alcohol
- Excessive lead exposure in childhood

## ADHD Symptoms

Current diagnostic criteria indicate that the disorder is marked by behaviors that are long-lasting and evident for at least six months. Children with ADHD may exhibit a combination of symptoms.<sup>(6)</sup>

### Inattention symptoms

- Making careless mistakes
- Not listening
- Forgetful
- Losing things needed to complete tasks
- Not paying attention to detail
- Easily distracted
- Difficulty following instructions

### Hyperactivity-impulsivity symptoms

- Squirming
- Running or climbing at inappropriate times
- Talking excessively or out of turn
- Fidgeting
- Getting up often when seated
- Having trouble playing quietly
- Interrupting

It is normal for all children to have trouble focusing and behaving at times. However, these behaviors in children with ADHD are exhibited much more frequently and typically cause difficulties in school and social situations.

## Treatment Options

ADHD is diagnosed as one of three ADHD subtypes, each manifesting variations of the disorder's symptoms.<sup>(6)</sup>

- Predominantly Inattentive ADHD – Hyperactivity-impulsivity but not inattention symptoms
- Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive ADHD – Inattention but not hyperactivity-impulsivity symptoms
- Combined ADHD – Both inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity symptoms

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Treatment of ADHD is customized to address the type of ADHD affecting the child. One element of treatment is prescribed medication. Research has proven the safety and effectiveness of stimulant medications to relieve ADHD symptoms in both adults and children. The second component of treatment involves tools and strategies that help to improve behavior and organizational skills. Schedules, agendas, and timers can help the child stay focused on tasks. Parents and teachers can reduce inappropriate behaviors by providing periodic breaks that allow for active movement and small, malleable toys that offer continuous sensory stimuli.

Appropriate, consistent treatment can dramatically improve a child's ability to follow rules, organize tasks, control impulses and adhere to social norms. Physicians, teachers, and parents can work together with the child to develop an ADHD treatment and intervention plan.

## Next Steps

Children with ADHD look like their typically developing peers as no physical feature identifies their disability. Yet their behaviors can severely hinder their ability to succeed in school and in the community. Once a child has been diagnosed with ADHD, the process to effectively correct problem behaviors can begin.

However, it is important to remember that treatment takes time. When pursuing pharmaceutical interventions, defining the proper dosage for an ADHD medication is related to how rapidly the child's body metabolizes the drug. Therefore, a period of trial and error may be required to find the dose that yields the best results for a particular child.

After learning that a child has ADHD, families may wish to consult with a therapist to address the ADHD-related issues that can arise in family interactions. A child psychologist may be able to help the child cope with his or her diagnosis as well.

The period after a diagnosis should be a time of learning. Parents can access the many resources available on ADHD and its treatment options. Parents can acquire information on behavior management, either through consultation with a professional or through their own self-study, to identify parenting techniques that best support the child's needs.

It is important to talk about ADHD with other people in the child's life such as extended family, teachers, and coaches. They should have information that helps them support the child and contribute to the success of the treatment plan. Parents can talk with the child's school to discuss ADHD accommodations such as extra time on tests, periodic breaks, and seating that minimizes distraction.

## Looking to the Future

Siskin Children's Institute is here to serve as a resource to families as they learn about their child's diagnosis. Please contact our Outreach and Research Center to learn more about Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and take advantage of the resources, referrals, and training programs that we can provide to your family.

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## Lending Library Favorites on ADHD

- ADD/ADHD Behavior Change Resource Kit: Ready-to-Use Strategies and Activities for Helping Children with Attention Deficit Disorder (Flick)
- The A.D.D. Book: New Understandings, New Approaches to Parenting Your Child (Sears)
- The ADD/ADHD Checklist: A Practical Reference for Parents and Teachers (Rief)
- ADHD: A Complete and Authoritative Guide (Reiff)
- Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood through Adulthood (Hallowell)
- Learning to Slow Down and Pay Attention: A Book for Kids about ADHD (Nadeau)
- Parenting Children with ADHD: 10 Lessons That Medicine Cannot Teach (Monastra)
- The Survival Guide for Kids with ADD or ADHD (Taylor)
- Taking Charge of ADHD: The Complete, Authoritative Guide for Parents (Barkley)
- Teenagers with ADD: A Parent's Guide (Dendy)

## Helpful Websites

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry ([www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org))
- Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder – CHADD ([www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org))
- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities – NICHCY ([www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org))
- National Institute of Mental Health – NIMH ([www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov))  
*This website offers a colorful brochure for download that describes ADHD in brief and simple terms.*
- National Resource Center on ADHD ([www.help4adhd.org](http://www.help4adhd.org))

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2. Elia J, Ambrosini PJ, Rapoport JL (March 1999)
3. Robert P. Granacher (2007)
4. Joe Braun, Robert S. Kahn, Tanya Froehlich, Peggy Auinger and Bruce P. Lanphear (2006)
5. Maureen Hack (Spring 1995)
6. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition