

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

What is the ADHD?

- ADHD is a chronic condition of the brain that makes it difficult for children to control their behavior. It is one of the most common chronic conditions of childhood, affecting 4-12% of school-aged children.
- ADHD includes 3 groups of behavior symptoms – inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

Signs and Symptoms

- Inattention:
 - Often has a hard time paying attention, daydreams
 - Often does not seem to listen
 - Is easily distracted from work or play
 - Often does not seem to care about details, makes careless mistakes
 - Frequently does not follow through on instructions or finish tasks
 - Is disorganized
 - Frequently loses items
 - Often forgets things
 - Frequently avoids doing tasks that require ongoing mental effort
- Hyperactivity:
 - Is in constant motion, as if “driven by a motor”
 - Cannot stay seated
 - Frequently squirms or fidgets with hands/feet
 - Talks too much
 - Often runs, jumps, or climbs in inappropriate situations
 - Cannot play quietly
- Impulsivity:
 - Frequently acts and speaks without thinking
 - May run into the street without looking for traffic first
 - Frequently has trouble taking turns
 - Cannot wait for things
 - Often calls out answers before the question is complete
 - Frequently interrupts others

Diagnosis

- Teachers are often the first to notice behavior signs of possible ADHD.
- Your PCP will determine whether your child has ADHD using standard guidelines developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- ADHD is typically not diagnosed until 6 years of age since children change very rapidly during the preschool years.
- There is no single tests for ADHD. The process of diagnosis requires several steps and involves gathering information from multiple sources. Your PCP may ask you to fill out the NICHQ Vanderbilt Assessment Scale, as well as your child’s teacher.
- To confirm a diagnosis of ADHD, symptoms must:
 - Occur in more than one setting, such as home, school, and social situations and cause some impairment.
 - Significantly impair your child’s ability to function in some of the activities of daily life, such as schoolwork, relationships with parents or siblings, relationships with friends, or ability to function in groups, such as sports teams.
 - Start before child reaches 7 years of age (however, these may not be recognized as ADHD symptoms until child is older).
 - Have continued for more than 6 months .

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Treatment Options

- Stimulant Medications:
 - Types:
 - Methylphenidate, immediate release (i.e., Focalin, Methylin, Ritalin)
 - Methylphenidate, intermediate-acting (i.e., Metadate ER, Methylin ER, Ritalin ER)
 - Methylphenidate, extended-release (i.e., Concerta, Daytrana, Focalin XR, Metadate CD, Ritalin LA)
 - Amphetamine, immediate release (i.e., Adderall, Dexedrine, Dextrostat)
 - Amphetamine, intermediate-acting (i.e., Dexedrine Spansule)
 - Amphetamine, extended-release (i.e., Adderall-XR)
 - Common Side Effects:
 - Decrease appetite/weight loss
 - Sleep problems
 - Social withdrawal
 - Rebound effect (increased activity or a bad mood as the medication wears off)
 - Transient tics (vocal or motor)
- Non-Stimulant Medications:
 - Atomoxetine (i.e., Strattera)
- Which medication is best for your child?
 - For most children, stimulant medications are a safe and effective way to relieve ADHD symptoms. These medications help children with ADHD focus their thoughts better and ignore distractions.
 - The duration of action of the medication also plays a role in determining which medication is best for your child. If your child only needs the medication during school hours, they may benefit from an intermediate-acting medication, whereas a child who needs medication during school and after school for homework or sports may benefit from an extended-release medication.
 - It may take some time to find the best medication, dosage, and schedule for your child. Your child may need to try different types of stimulants or other medications to determine which is best for your child. Some children respond to one type of stimulant but not another.
- Behavioral Therapy:
 - Most experts recommend using both medication and behavior therapy to treat ADHD. This is known as a multimodal treatment approach.
 - There are many forms of behavior therapy, but they all have a common goal to change the child's physical and social environments to help the child improve their behavior.
 - Through behavioral therapy, parents, teachers, and caregivers learn better ways to work with and relate to the child. You will learn how to set and enforce rules, help your child understand what they need to do, use discipline effectively, and encourage good behavior. Your child will learn better ways to control his behavior as a result.
- 3 Basic Principles for Behavior Therapy:
 - Set specific goals. Set clear goals for your child, such as staying focused on homework for a certain time or sharing toys with friends.
 - Provide rewards and consequences. Give your child a specified reward (positive reinforcement) every time they show the desired behavior. Give your child a consequence (unwanted result or punishment, such as time-out) consistently when they fail to meet a goal.
 - Keep using the rewards and consequences consistently. This will shape your child's behavior in a positive way.

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How you can help your child at home

- **Keep child on a daily schedule.** Try to keep the time that your child wakes up, eats, bathes, leaves for school, and goes to sleep the same each day.
- **Cut down distractions.** Loud music, computer games, and TV can be overstimulating to your child. Make it a rule to keep the TV or music off during mealtime and while your child is doing homework. Whenever possible, avoid taking your child to places that may be too stimulating, like busy shopping malls.
- **Organize house.** If your child has specific and logical places to keep their schoolwork, toys, and clothes, they are less likely to lose them. Save a spot near the front door for their backpack so they can grab it on the way out the door.
- **Reward positive behavior.** Offer kind words, hugs, or small prizes for reaching goals in a timely manner or good behavior. Praise and reward your child's efforts to pay attention.
- **Set small, reachable goals.** Aim for slow progress rather than instant results. Be sure that your child understands that he can take small steps toward learning to control himself.
- **Help child stay "on task".** Use charts and checklists to track progress with homework or chores. Keep instructions brief. Offer frequent, friendly reminders.
- **Limit choices.** Help your child learn to make good decisions by giving them only 2-3 options at a time.
- **Find activities your child can succeed at.** All children need to experience success to feel good about themselves.
- **Use calm discipline.** Use consequences such as time-out, removing the child from the situation or distraction. Sometimes it is best to simply ignore the behavior. Physical punishment, such as spanking or slapping, is not helpful. Discuss your child's behavior with them when you are both calm.

How can schools help your child

- Keep a set routine and schedule for activities.
- Use a system of clear rewards and consequences, such as a point system or token economy.
- Sending daily or weekly report cards or behavior charts to parents to inform them about the child's progress.
- Seat the child near the teacher.
- Use small groups for activities.
- Encourage students to pause a moment before answering questions.
- Keep assignments short or breaking them into sections.
- Close supervision with frequent, positive cues to stay on task.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Will my child outgrow ADHD?
 - In most cases, ADHD continues into adulthood. However, by developing their strengths, structuring their environments, and using medication when needed, adults with ADHD can lead very productive lives. In some careers, having a high-energy behavior pattern can be an asset.
- Why do so many children have ADHD?
 - The number of children being treated for ADHD has risen. It's not clear whether more children have ADHD or more children are being diagnosed with ADHD. Also, more children with ADHD are being treated for a longer period. ADHD is now one of the most common and most studied conditions of childhood. Because of more awareness and better ways of diagnosing this condition, more children are being helped.
- What are the risks of stimulant medications?
 - Stimulants are classified as Schedule II drugs by the US Drug Enforcement Administration because there is abuse potential for this class of medication. If your child is on medication, it is always best to supervise the use of the medication closely.
 - There is no evidence that children "get high" on stimulant medications. At therapeutic doses, these drugs also do not sedate or tranquilize children.