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HEALTH ISSUES

Understanding ADHD: Information for Parents

Almost all children have times when their behavior veers out of control. They may speed about in constant motion, make noise nonstop, refuse to wait their turn, and crash into everything around them. At other times they may drift as if in a daydream, unable to pay attention or finish what they start.



However, for some children, these kinds of behaviors are more than an occasional problem. Children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (<http://www.healthychildren.org/english/health-issues/conditions/adhd/Pages/default.aspx>) have behavior problems that are so frequent and severe that they interfere with their ability to live normal lives.

These children often have trouble getting along with siblings and other children at school, at home, and in other settings. Those who have trouble paying attention usually have trouble learning. An impulsive nature may put them in actual physical danger. Because children with ADHD have difficulty controlling this behavior, they may be labeled "bad kids" or "space cadets."

Left untreated, ADHD in some children will continue to cause serious, lifelong problems, such as poor grades in school, run-ins with the law, failed relationships, and the inability to keep a job.

Effective treatment is available (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/pages/Determining-ADHD-Medication-Treatments.aspx>). If your child has ADHD, your pediatrician can offer a long-term treatment plan (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/Pages/Treatment-of-ADHD-and-Related-Disorders.aspx>) to help your child lead a happy and healthy life. As a parent, you have a very important role in this treatment.

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a condition of the brain that makes it difficult for children to control their behavior. It is one of the most common chronic conditions (<http://www.healthychildren.org/english/health-issues/conditions/chronic/Pages/default.aspx>) of childhood. It affects 4% to 12% of school-aged children. ADHD is diagnosed in about 3 times more boys than girls (</English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/Pages/Girls-and-ADHD.aspx>).

The condition affects behavior in specific ways.

What are the symptoms of ADHD?

ADHD includes 3 groups of behavior symptoms: inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. The table below explains these

Symptoms of ADHD

Symptom	How a child with this symptom may behave	
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 a lot of important things
		Often forgets things
		Frequently avoids doing things that require ongoing mental effort
Hyperactivity	Is in constant motion, as if "driven by a motor"	
	Cannot stay seated	
	Frequently squirms and fidgets	
	Talks too much	
	Often runs, jumps, and climbs when this is not permitted	
	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	

Are there different types of ADHD?

Not all children with ADHD have all the symptoms. They may have one or more of the symptom groups listed in the table above. The symptoms usually are classified as the following types of ADHD:

- **Inattentive only** (*formerly known as attention-deficit disorder [ADD]*)—Children with this form of ADHD are not overly active. Because they do not disrupt the classroom or other activities, their symptoms may not be noticed. Among girls with ADHD, this form is more common.
- **Hyperactive/impulsive**—Children with this type of ADHD show both hyperactive and impulsive behavior, but they can pay attention. They are the least common group and are frequently younger.
- **Combined inattentive/hyperactive/impulsive**—Children with this type of ADHD show a number of symptoms in all 3 dimensions. It is the type that most people think of when they think of ADHD.

How can I tell if my child has ADHD?

Remember, it is normal for all children to show some of these symptoms from time to time. Your child may be reacting to stress at school or home. She may be bored or going through a difficult stage of life. It does not mean she has ADHD.

Sometimes a teacher is the first to notice inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsivity and bring these symptoms to the parents' attention.

Perhaps questions from your pediatrician raised the issue. At routine visits, pediatricians often ask questions such as:

- How is your child doing in school
(<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/pages/Your-Child-At-School.aspx>)?
- Are there any problems with learning that you or your child's teachers have seen?

- Is your child happy in school?
- Is your child having problems completing class work or homework?
- Are you concerned with any behavior problems in school, at home, or when your child is playing with friends?

Your answers to these questions may lead to further evaluation for ADHD.

If your child has shown symptoms of ADHD on a regular basis for more than 6 months, discuss this with your pediatrician.

Additional Information on HealthyChildren.org:

- Causes of ADHD: What We Know Today
(<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/pages/Causes-of-ADHD.aspx>)
- Treatment & Target Outcomes for Children with ADHD
(<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/Pages/Treatment-of-ADHD-and-Related-Disorders.aspx>)
- Common ADHD Medications & Treatments for Children
(<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/pages/Determining-ADHD-Medication-Treatments.aspx>)
- How Schools Can Help Children with ADHD
(<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/pages/Your-Child-At-School.aspx>)

Additional Resources:

The following is a list of support groups and additional resources for further information about ADHD. Check with your pediatrician for resources in your community.

- National Resource Center on AD/HD (<http://www.help4adhd.org/>)
- Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) (<http://www.chadd.org/>) or 800/233-4050
- Attention Deficit Disorder Association (<http://www.add.org/>) or 856/439-9099
- Center for Parent Information and Resources (<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/>)
- National Institute of Mental Health (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>) or 866/615-6464
- Tourette Association of America (<http://www.tourette.org/>) or 888/4-TOURET (486-8738)

Last Updated 1/9/2017

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The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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ie HONcode standard for trustworthy health (<http://www.healthonnet.org/HONcode/Conduct.html>)

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