

## **What is ADHD?**

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a condition in which characterized by inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. ADHD is most commonly diagnosed in young people, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). An estimated 9% of children between ages 3–17 have ADHD. While ADHD is usually diagnosed in childhood, it does not only affect children. An estimated 4% of adults have ADHD.

With treatment, most people with ADHD can be successful in school, work and lead productive lives. Researchers are using new tools such as brain imaging to better understand the condition and to find more effective ways to treat and prevent ADHD.

### **Symptoms**

While some behaviors associated with ADHD are normal, someone with ADHD will have trouble controlling these behaviors and will show them much more frequently and for longer than 6 months.

Signs of inattention include:

- Becoming easily distracted, and jumping from activity to activity.
- Becoming bored with a task quickly.
- Difficulty focusing attention or completing a single task or activity.
- Trouble completing or turning in homework assignments.
- Losing things such as school supplies or toys.
- Not listening or paying attention when spoken to.
- Daydreaming or wandering with lack of motivation.
- Difficulty processing information quickly.
- Struggling to follow directions.

Signs of hyperactivity include:

- Fidgeting and squirming, having trouble sitting still.
- Non-stop talking.
- Touching or playing with everything.
- Difficulty doing quiet tasks or activities.

Signs of impulsivity include:

- Impatience.
- Acting without regard for consequences, blurting things out.
- Difficulty taking turns, waiting or sharing.
- Interrupting others.

## Causes

There are several factors believed to contribute to ADHD:

- **Genetics.** Research shows that genes may be a large contributor to ADHD. ADHD often runs in families and some trends in specific brain areas that contribute to attention.
- **Environmental factors.** Studies show a link between cigarette smoking and alcohol use during pregnancy and children who have ADHD. Exposure to lead as a child has also been shown to increase the likelihood of ADHD in children.

## Diagnosis

ADHD occurs in both children and adults, but is most often and diagnosed in childhood. Getting a diagnosis for ADHD can sometimes be difficult because the symptoms of ADHD are similar to typical behavior in most young children. Teachers are often the first to notice ADHD symptoms because they see children in a learning environment with peers every day.

There is no one single test that can diagnose a child with ADHD, so meet with a doctor or mental health professional to gather all the necessary information to make a diagnosis. The goal is to rule out any outside causes for symptoms, such as environmental changes, difficulty in school, medical problems and ensure that a child is otherwise healthy.

## Treatment

ADHD is managed and treated in several ways:

- Medications, including stimulants, nonstimulants and antidepressants
- Behavioral therapy
- Self-management, education programs and assistance through schools or work or alternative treatment approaches

Source: National Alliance on Mental Health