

ADHD

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, sometimes called ADHD, is a chronic condition and the most commonly diagnosed behavioral disorder among children and adolescents. It occurs in about one in twenty children in this country. Boys are diagnosed with ADHD four times more frequently than girls. ADHD can affect children, teenagers and adults.

Individuals with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder may have difficulty with self-control, act impulsively, and tend to be accident-prone. Most individuals with ADHD have normal or above average intelligence, but their concentration and focus problems may interfere with their ability to perform in school or work.

There are three different types of ADHD. Individuals diagnosed with the *inattentive type* primarily show problems with their attention span, increased problems with distractibility, and sometimes appear as if they are not listening, not well organized, or have trouble finishing tasks. Those with the *hyperactive-impulsive type* may appear restless and fidgety, may not be able to stay in their seats, have difficulty sharing and taking turns, and seem to interrupt other frequently. The most common type of ADHD is *combined attention-deficit/hyperactivity type*, which, is a combination of the inattentive and the hyperactive-impulsive types.

A diagnosis of one of the attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorders requires the symptoms to last at least six months. Generally, symptoms need to be observed in at least two different settings, such as home and school or home and work, before a diagnosis is made. Checklists, completed by teachers, co-workers or family members may be requested by your clinician as part of the evaluation process.

Children and adolescents with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder are at risk for other behavioral health problems including oppositional disorder, anxiety disorders, mood disorders and learning disabilities. As teens or adults, untreated individuals may be more likely to develop personality disorders or substance use/abuse problems.

Many types of medications have been used to treat attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. The most widely used drugs are stimulants, but antidepressants and non-stimulant ADHD medications may also be used to treat ADHD. The cause of ADHD is unknown.

Behavior therapy, which involves using strategies to modify the behavior of children with ADHD is often helpful. This approach may include specialized reward systems to reinforce positive and discourage negative behaviors.

It is generally believed that the best treatment approach for ADHD includes combining stimulants and behavior therapy.

Parents and caregivers should be careful not to jump to conclusions about the whether or not their child has ADHD. A high energy child, without other symptoms or problems, does not automatically mean that the child has ADHD. Also, problems with attention can sometimes be due to other psychological problems. ADHD requires a careful initial assessment done by a qualified behavioral health clinician. Treatment is available and helpful if approached by a skilled clinician along with family support.