

ADHD: Does My Child Have It?

What are the signs of ADHD?

ADHD stands for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. Children with ADHD may have hyperactive behavior, a lack of attention and difficulty concentrating. Most children with ADHD have signs of both hyperactivity and attention problems. Some children, though, may have only signs of inattention. This kind of problem used to be called attention-deficit disorder (ADD). ADD is now thought of as a form of ADHD.

Signs of hyperactive behavior

- Almost constant fidgeting and restlessness
- Not sitting in the same seat for very long
- Running or climbing at wrong time or place
- Talking too much
- Always playing too loudly
- Always "on the go"
- Blurting out answers to questions in school
- Cutting in line or unable to wait for a turn in activities
- Interrupting others

How can I tell if my child has ADHD?

It might help to ask yourself some questions about your child's behavior. This handout lists some of the questions you and your child's doctor may discuss. In fact, if you've talked with your doctor about your child's behavior, your doctor may have already asked you some of these questions.

How long has your child been too active?

Hyperactive children with ADHD have had problems with hyperactive, impulsive behavior since before age 7. Mothers of children with ADHD sometimes even remember that their baby was very active in the womb. Also, children with ADHD are often described by their parents as having been fussy and difficult to quiet as babies.

Signs of a lack of attention

- Difficulty following instructions
- Not seeming to listen to parents or teachers
- Not being able to focus on activities
- Frequently losing things needed for school or at home
- Not being able to pay attention to details
- Appearing disorganized
- Being unable to plan ahead effectively

- Being forgetful
- Appearing very distractible

Is your child's behavior a problem in several different settings?

ADHD is less likely if your child only shows behavior problems at home, but not in other places, such as at school or at the grocery store. ADHD problems often become worse where there is more activity and noise. Children with ADHD show some of the signs of hyperactivity in several different settings, for example, in the classroom, on the playground, and at home watching TV. (Children with ADHD are often able to stay focused on the fast pace of cartoons and video games. But even though their eyes are on the screen, they're fidgeting with their arms and legs.)

When your child is misbehaving, does he or she seem to be off in "another world"?

Children with ADHD cannot control at least some of their hyperactive, impulsive behavior. Suspect ADHD if your child appears off in "another world" and does not respond to you when he or she is climbing or misbehaving in some way. In contrast, children who misbehave on purpose often will look to see how adults react to their misbehavior.

Are you more angry with your child or more frustrated?

Sometimes it's normal for parents to get angry with their children, especially when they misbehave on purpose. The hyperactivity of children with ADHD is irritating, but parents can sense that their child simply can't--as opposed to won't--sit still or quiet down. The parents feel more frustrated than angry.

Can your child stick to activities, or is the house full of unfinished games and projects?

Children with ADHD often lose interest in an activity in 5 minutes--or even less. They go from one activity to another, and another and another. You may ask your child many times to clean up, but he or she will not even be able to focus long enough to do that.

Has disciplining your child worked?

Parents of children with ADHD usually have "tried everything"--from ignoring their child's misbehavior, to "time-outs," to spanking--but nothing seems to work.

What should I do if I think my child has ADHD?

Talk to your child's doctor. A diagnosis of ADHD can be made only by getting information about your child's behavior from several people who know your child. Your doctor will ask you questions and may want to get information from your child's teachers or anyone else who is familiar with your child's behavior.

Your doctor will do vision and hearing tests if these tests haven't been done recently. Your doctor also may have forms or checklists that you and your child's teacher can fill out. This will help you and your doctor compare your child's behavior with other children's behavior.

It might be hard for your doctor to tell if your child has ADHD. For this reason, your doctor may want your child to see someone, such as a psychologist, who specializes in helping children with behavior problems. Many children with ADHD aren't hyperactive in the doctor's office.

Your doctor may recommend trying medicine to see if it helps to control your child's hyperactive behavior. A trial of medicine alone cannot be the basis for diagnosing ADHD, but it can be an important part of evaluating your child if ADHD is suspected.

Where can I learn more?

For more information about ADHD and to find out about support groups in your area:

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit Disorder (ChADD)

8181 Professional Place Suite 201

Landover, MD 20785

Phone: 800-233-4050

<http://www.chadd.org>

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ADHD: Info and Advice for Parents

What is ADHD?

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is the name of a group of behaviors found in many children and adults. People with ADHD have trouble paying attention in school, at home or at work. They may be much more active and/or impulsive than what is usual for their age. These behaviors contribute to significant problems in relationships, learning and behavior. For this reason, children with ADHD are sometimes seen as being "difficult" or as having behavior problems. ADHD is common, affecting 1 in 20 children. It's more common in boys than in girls.

What can I do to help my child with ADHD?

A team effort, with parents, teachers and doctors working together, is the best way to help your child. Children with ADHD tend to need more structure and clearer expectations. Some children benefit from counseling or from structured therapy. Families may benefit from talking with a specialist in managing ADHD-related behavior and learning problems. Medicine also helps many children. Talk with your doctor about what treatments he or she recommends.

What medicines are used to treat ADHD?

Some of the medicines for ADHD are methylphenidate (brand name: Ritalin), dextroamphetamine (brand name: Dexedrine), pemoline (brand name: Cylert) and a combination drug called Adderall. These medicines improve attention and concentration, and decrease impulsive and overactive behaviors. Other medicines can also be used to treat ADHD.

What can I do at home to help my child?

- **Make a schedule.** Set specific times for waking up, eating, playing, doing homework, doing chores, watching TV or playing video games, and going to bed. Post the schedule where your child will always see it. Explain any changes to the routine in advance.
- **Make simple house rules.** It's important to explain what will happen when the rules are obeyed and when they are broken. Write down the rules and the results of not following them.
- **Make sure your directions are understood.** Get your child's attention and look directly into his or her eyes. Then tell your child in a clear, calm voice specifically what you want. Keep directions simple and short. Ask your child to repeat the directions back to you.
- **Reward good behavior.** Congratulate your child when he or she completes each step of a task.
- **Make sure your child is supervised all the time.** Because they are impulsive, children with ADHD may need more adult supervision than other children their age.
- **Watch your child around his or her friends.** It's sometimes hard for children with ADHD to learn social skills. Reward good play behaviors.
- **Set a homework routine.** Pick a regular place for doing homework, away from distractions such as other people, TV and video games. Break homework time into small parts and have breaks.
- **Focus on effort, not grades.** Reward your child when he or she tries to finish school work, not just for good grades. You can give extra rewards for earning better grades.
- **Talk with your child's teachers.** Find out how your child is doing at school -- in class, at playtime, at lunchtime. Ask for daily or weekly progress notes from the teacher.

Will my child outgrow ADHD?

We used to think children would "grow out" of ADHD. We now know that is not true for most children, but children with ADHD do get better as they grow older. Hyperactivity often stops in the late teenage years. With help from parents, teachers and others, children can learn to cope with the attention problems and grow into creative and productive adults.

How can I learn more?

For more information contact the following organizations:

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

800-233-4050

www.chadd.org

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

202-966-7300

www.aacap.org

National Institute of Mental Health Public Inquiries

301-443-4513

www.nimh.nih.gov

American Psychiatric Association

888-35-PSYCH

www.psych.org

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

800-950-NAMI

www.nami.org

National Mental Health Association

800-969-NMHA

www.nmha.org

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