

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

What is ADHD?

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common neurobehavioral disorders of childhood. People with ADHD have difficulty paying attention and are often easily distracted. They also may be impulsive (act without thinking) or hyperactive. ADHD is estimated to occur in 3-7% of children. It is more common in boys than girls. ADHD is a lifelong disorder, although symptoms can improve with age.

Common symptoms of ADHD

There are several common symptoms of ADHD:

- Difficulty paying attention
- Daydreaming
- Easily distracted
- Rushes through tasks
- Fidgets and squirms
- Always "on the go"
- Trouble completing tasks
- Doesn't listen
- Forgetful
- Interrupts or talks a lot
- Acts without thinking
- Disorganized
- Often loses things
- Noisy or disruptive

All of these behaviors can be typical childhood behaviors. However, in children with ADHD, these symptoms are frequent, severe, and disruptive at home and school. Other problems, like anxiety, depression, poor sleep, seizures, learning disabilities, and other medical, developmental, and emotional problems, can cause ADHD-like symptoms. Part of evaluation is ruling out any other possible causes of those symptoms.

Types of ADHD

There are three main types of ADHD:

1. **Inattentive:** These children are "daydreamers" and have difficulty staying on task.
2. **Hyperactive:** These children are very physically active or restless, talkative, and always "on the go."
3. **Combined:** This is the most common type of ADHD. These children have both inattentive and hyperactive behaviors.

How is ADHD diagnosed?

There is no single lab test, brain image, or any other special test that can diagnose ADHD. The diagnosis is usually made by observing the child and obtaining a thorough history from the child's caregivers. Questionnaires filled out by family and educators help your child's neurology provider make the diagnosis. To be diagnosed with ADHD, children must meet very specific developmental and behavioral criteria.



What causes ADHD or places a child at risk for ADHD?

No one knows exactly what causes ADHD. Research shows that genetics play an important role. Sometimes, other stress to the brain, such as prematurity, prenatal drug or alcohol exposure, brain injury,

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or environmental exposures (for example, lead), can increase risk for ADHD. Sometimes children with other developmental problems, like autism, can have ADHD symptoms. *Usually, a cause for ADHD is not found.*

What can I expect in the neurology office?

Our providers will obtain a thorough medical and developmental history from you and your child. We will perform a simple physical exam. We may feel comfortable diagnosing your child with ADHD at their first visit. More often, however, we request questionnaires or surveys from family and teachers, require further testing with a psychologist, or order other medical tests or studies. This is to help confirm an ADHD diagnosis and rule out any other medical, developmental, or mental health problems or learning disabilities.

How is ADHD treated?

There is no cure for ADHD. The most common and effective treatment of ADHD is medication. We often suggest working with a behavioral therapist or psychologist as well. We strongly recommend academic accommodations for children with ADHD. Sometimes we suggest nonprescription dietary supplements that might help reduce ADHD symptoms. We do not endorse a special or specific diet for children with ADHD.

Resources and References:

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/
www.chadd.org