



A-ATTENTION D-DEFICIT H-HYPERACTIVITY D-DISORDER

A Ready Reckoner

ADHD is a disorder that makes it difficult for a person to pay attention and control impulsive behaviors. He or she may also be restless and almost constantly active. ADHD is not just a childhood disorder. Problems with inattention, disorganisation, and poor impulse control often continue through the teen years and into adulthood.

A number of factors may contribute to ADHD such as genes, cigarette smoking, alcohol use, or drug use during pregnancy, exposure to environmental toxins, such as high levels of lead, at a young age, low birth weight and brain injuries.

People who have ADHD have combinations of these symptoms:

- Have problems sustaining attention in conversations, lectures, or lengthy reading
- Seem to not listen when spoken to directly
- Fail to follow through on instructions, finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace, or start tasks but quickly lose focus and get easily sidetracked
- Have problems organising tasks and activities, keeping materials and belongings in order, managing time, and meeting deadlines
- Avoid or dislike tasks that require sustained mentaleffort
- Lose things needed for daily tasks such as pens, books, tools, wallets, keys, paperwork, eyeglasses, and cell phones
- Become easily distracted by unrelated thoughts or stimuli
- Forgetful in daily activities, such as chores, returning calls, and keeping appointments
- Fidgeting and squirming while seated
- Being constantly in motion or “on the go,” or acting as if “driven by a motor”
- Talking non-stop, blurting out an answer before a question has been completed, finishing other people’s sentences, or speaking without waiting for a turn in conversation

Showing these signs and symptoms does not necessarily mean a person has ADHD. Many other problems, like anxiety, depression, and certain types of learning disabilities, can have similar symptoms.

Treatment:

- ADHD is commonly treated with medication, education or training, therapy, or a combination of treatments. ADHD medications reduce hyperactivity and impulsivity and improve the ability to focus, work, and learn. The first line of treatment for ADHD is **stimulants** that increase the brain chemical dopamine, which plays essential roles in thinking and attention.
- **Non-stimulants** such as **atomoxetine** and **guanfacine** to improve focus, attention, and impulsivity in a person with ADHD.
- **Antidepressants** are sometimes used to treat adults with ADHD. Older antidepressants, called tricyclics, sometimes are used because they, like stimulants, affect the brain chemicals norepinephrine and dopamine.
- **For Children and Teens:** Parents and teachers can help children and teens with ADHD stay organised and follow directions with tools such as keeping a routine and a schedule, organising everyday items, using homework and notebook organisers, and giving praise or rewards when rules are followed.
- **For Adults:** A licensed mental health provider or therapist can help an adult with ADHD learn how to organise his or her life with tools such as keeping routines and breaking down large tasks into more manageable, smaller tasks.

Education and Training

Children and adults with ADHD need guidance and understanding from their parents, families, and teachers to reach their full potential and to succeed. Mental health professionals can educate the parents of a child with ADHD about the condition and how it affects a family. They can also help the child and his or her parents develop new skills, attitudes, and ways of relating to each other. Examples include:

- Parenting skills training teaches parents the skills they need to encourage and reward positive behaviors in their children.
- Stress management techniques can benefit parents of children with ADHD by increasing their ability to deal with frustration so that they can respond calmly to their child's behavior.
- Support groups can help parents and families connect with others who have similar problems and concerns.

Adding behavioral therapy, counseling, and practical support can help people with ADHD and their families to better cope with everyday problems.

References:

- 1) National Institute of Mental Health (USA) <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/index.shtml>
- 2) Centers for Disease Control (USA) <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/facts.html>
- 3) National Health Services (UK) <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/symptoms/>

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This resource was designed by REACH as part of our efforts to help improve the quality and frequency of media reporting on NCDs.