

When Adults Have ADHD

What is attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder?

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder is also called ADHD. People with ADHD are hyperactive or distracted most of the time. Even when they try to concentrate, they find it hard to pay attention.

People with ADHD have a hard time organizing things, listening to instructions, remembering details and controlling their behavior. As a result, people with ADHD often have problems getting along with other people at home, at school or at work.

There is a lot of information in the news about ADHD. Usually the news is about ADHD in children. Not as much is known about the way ADHD affects adults. ADHD is a mental health problem that is often overlooked in adults. Often adults with ADHD are diagnosed when they find out their children have ADHD. This is a health problem that may be inherited.

Children with ADHD seem to follow one of three paths: (1) A third of them grow out of ADHD when they are teenagers. (2) A third of them keep having problems with attention and hyperactivity. (3) The other third keep having ADHD problems and get other behavior problems along with it.

How is ADHD diagnosed?

Many people try to diagnose themselves by using a quiz or a checklist they find in a magazine or see on TV. While these lists can be helpful, it's best to see your doctor if you think you have ADHD. Your doctor might think about questions like these:

- Do your behaviors and feelings show that you have problems with attention and hyperactivity? (Your doctor might ask you questions about your past, your life now and your relationships. You may be asked to write down answers on forms.)
- Have you had these problems for a long time, ever since you were a child? People don't suddenly get ADHD when they are grown up.
- Do you have a hard time keeping your temper or staying in a good mood? Have you had these kinds of problems since you were a young child? Do these problems happen to you both at work and at home? Do family members and friends see that you have problems in these areas?
- Do you have any physical or mental health problems that might affect your behavior? Your doctor may give you a physical exam and tests to see if you have medical problems that are like ADHD.

If it isn't ADHD, what could it be?

A person can be jittery or distracted for many reasons. Here are some of the other problems your doctor may think about:

- Depression or mood problems
- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Side effects of prescription and over-the-counter medicines, and herbal medicines
- Thyroid problems or other hormone problems
- Alcoholism or street-drug use
- Exposure to lead

What can I do if I have ADHD?

If your doctor thinks you have ADHD, he or she may prescribe medicine and suggest behavior changes. Your doctor may also send you to a someone who specializes in ADHD for more testing and counseling. Doctors use several medicines to treat adults with ADHD. Some of these medicines, like stimulants and antidepressants, were first developed for other health problems.

Stimulants and antidepressants often help people with ADHD. They may help you improve your ability to pay attention, to concentrate and to control your impulses. These medicines are easy to take and usually have few side effects. It's important that you take them just the way your doctor tells you.

What else can I do to help myself?

You can learn ways to change your work environment and keep distractions to a minimum. Many organizational tools and planners can help you focus on activities at work and at home.

Many people with ADHD find counseling is helpful. A lifetime of ADHD behaviors and problems can cause you to have low self-esteem and friction with your family members. Individual counseling and support groups may help you with these problems.

Where can I get more information about ADHD in adults?

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
Web address: www.ninds.nih.gov/health_and_medical/disorders/adhd.htm

Attention Deficit Information Network, Inc. (AD-IN)
475 Hillside Ave.
Needham, MA 02194-1200
Web address: www.addinfofonetwork.com
Telephone: 1-781-455-9895

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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