

ADD and ADHD

What is Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder?

ADD/ADHD is a diagnosis applied to individuals who consistently display certain characteristic behaviors excessively, long-term, and pervasively. The behaviors must create a real handicap in at least two areas of a person's life, such as school, home, work, or social setting. The most common core features include:

- **Inattentiveness** (poor sustained attention to tasks or easily distracted)
- **Hyperactivity** (excessive activity and physical restlessness)
- **Impulsivity** (impaired impulse control and delay of gratification)

According to the DSM-IV (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition) that doctors use to diagnose ADD/ADH and other disorders. Some common symptoms include:

Inattention

- often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in school work or work
- often has difficulty sustaining attention to tasks or play activities
- often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties at work (not due to oppositional behavior or failure to understand instructions)
- often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- often avoids, dislikes or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (homework)
- often loses things necessary for tasks or activities easily distracted by outside stimuli
- often forgetful in daily activities

Hyperactivity

- often fidgets with hands or feet, squirms in seat
- often leaves seat in classroom or in situations in which remaining in seat is expected
- often feels restless
- often has difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly
- often "on the go" or often acts as if "driven by a motor"
- often talks excessively

Impulsivity

- often blurts out answers before questions have been completed
- often has difficulty waiting turn
- often interrupts or intrudes on others (interrupts conversations)

It should be kept in mind that the exact nature and severity of ADHD symptoms varies from person to person. If six or more of the above symptoms have persisted for at least six months to a degree that is inconsistent with the student's developmental level you should see professional approval for a diagnosis. There are several types of Attention Deficit. Each type is based on specific criteria from some or all of the areas above, which can only be determined by your physician.

Diagnosis

It is essential that a proper diagnosis is made before an appropriate treatment plan can be placed into action. Ask your family doctor to refer you to an ADD/ADHD specialist. An evaluation in the following areas should be done:

- **physical exam**- history and /or exam from medical doctor
- **academic testing**-(including aptitude) –testing to find out IQ and to rule out a the possibility of a learning disability
- **psychological testing**- testing to find out if there are any emotional issues
- **behavioral testing** – to evaluate any major behavioral issues
- **occasionally neurological testing**

Also needed are a complete family history, parents and teacher rating scales on children. With all this information, the doctor can eliminate other problems that exhibit many of the same symptoms as ADD/ADHD. Once a proper diagnosis has been made a treatment plan can be designed and placed into action.

Is it ADD or ADHD?

The difference is mostly one of terminology, which can be confusing at times. The "official" clinical diagnosis is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD. In turn ADHD is broken down into different subtypes: Combined Type; Predominantly Inattentive Type; and Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is a neurological syndrome, which is characterized by poor attention span and weak impulses control. With ADHD, there is added hyperactivity. Many people use the term ADD as a generic term for all types of ADHD. The term ADD has gained popularity among the general public, in the media, and is even commonly used among professionals. We are basically still talking about the same thing however, whether we call it ADD or ADHD.

Why didn't we know if our child had ADD or ADHD before they became a teenager?

Generally, teen behaviors magnify ADD and ADHD. So, it is common for a child not to be diagnosed until they become a teenager.

I need to understand, what is my ADD teen going through?

ADD students have extra sensory perception. Which means they sense everything at once. Therefore they cannot process all the information they are sensing, hence the behavior problems. So when you ask them to do something, it doesn't get done. You're wondering if they heard you. Yes, they heard you. They also heard the TV in the next room, they saw a new pattern in the wallpaper, felt the tag in the back of their shirt stick them, etc. Some people say it is like watching several TV channels at once.

Is ADD/ADHD curable? Treatable?

It is not curable. Clinical experience has shown that the most effective treatment is a combination of medication (when necessary), therapy or counseling to learning coping skills and adaptive behaviors. It usually persists throughout a person's lifetime. It is NOT limited to children. Approximately one-half to two-thirds of children with ADD/ADHD will continue to have significant problems with symptoms and behaviors as adults, which impacts their lives on the job, within the family, and in social relationships. However, many adults with ADD/ADHD have found jobs in places where they can excel.

Medication is often used to help normalize brain activity, as prescribed by a physician. Stimulant medications are commonly used because they have been shown to be most effective for most people with ADD/ADHD, however many other medications may also be used at the discretion of the physician. When drugs are used they help to filter out the 'extra' sensory perceptions, and allow the teen to focus.

Behavior therapy and cognitive therapy is often helpful to modify certain behaviors and to deal with the emotional effects of ADD/ADHD.

ADD/ADHD is recognized as a disability under federal legislation (the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; the Americans With Disabilities Act; and the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act). Appropriate and reasonable accommodations are sometimes made at school for children with ADD/ADHD.

Research

There is a great deal of evidence that ADHD runs in families, which is suggestive of genetic factors. If one person in a family is diagnosed with ADHD there is a 25% to 35% probability that any other family member also has ADHD, compared to a 4% to 6% probability for someone in the general population.

Sources:

<http://parentingteens.about.com/library/weekly/aa051997.htm>
http://www.troubledteen.com/teen_disorder/add.php
<http://www.canadianparents.com/articles/feature83g.htm>