

# ADHD

## Learning to Regulate Attention and Impulses

### WHAT TO KNOW

- Three types of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) exist: An inattentive presentation (often called attention deficit disorder, or ADD, in the past), a hyperactive/impulsive presentation, and a combined presentation of both.
- The root of ADHD lies in regulating attention or impulse control.
- Both medical and non-medical treatments are available for ADHD; a diagnosis does not automatically mean a prescription for Ritalin.
- ADHD is the most inclusive term for an inattentive presentation of the disorder.

### COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

Some people believe that ADHD affects only boys, and not girls. While more boys are diagnosed with ADHD, girls are also at risk and, unfortunately, many go undiagnosed.

Another misconception is that children will outgrow ADHD. In fact, studies show that 75 percent of individuals diagnosed as children continue to show symptoms as adults, including being easily distracted, and difficulty initiating and completing tasks.

### IDENTIFYING ADHD

A child staring out the window, lost in daydreams, and a student who can't seem to sit still and focus—Even though, by outward appearances, these children seem to be acting out completely different behaviors, they both stem from the same place: attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, also known as ADHD, is related to an individual's ability to regulate attention and/or impulses, and is an executive functioning disorder.

While a student with hyperactivity may be identified early in their schooling, sixth grade is when many children are identified as having ADHD/predominantly inattentive presentation—simply because that is the year in which many students transition from having a single classroom teacher to having multiple teachers and classes.

With increased challenge to their attention abilities and tracking skills, the presentation of ADHD becomes more obvious to those around them, and children begin struggling to keep up with the demands of middle school and beyond.

### INATTENTIVE ADHD

When a child has inattentive ADHD, they struggle to stay focused and sustain attention over a period of time, they are easily distracted, and they might be prone to losing things. Time management is challenging for these children, as is memory and planning ahead. Diagnosing this disorder can be particularly difficult as it can be masked by compensation skills. Additionally, extremely engaging and interesting environments can capture a child's attention and help them maintain focus.

### One way psychologists test to identify if inattentive ADHD is the problem

Give your child an extremely boring task. If, in comparison to other children, your child cannot maintain attention as well as their peers, it may be due to inattentive ADHD.

## HYPERACTIVE/COMPULSIVE ADHD

Hyperactive ADHD is the first type of ADHD that comes to mind for most. It signifies behavior that is extremely impulsive and restless—when a child has trouble sitting still and has an extreme need to move.

There's a tendency to rush through every task, and if a child has a high-functioning memory and processing speed, these children can actually achieve academic success despite the child's hurry to complete projects.

Many children with the hyperactive/impulsive presentation are identified as young as kindergarten, where their active behavior stands out in comparison to their peers.

## OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES OF COMBINED PRESENTATION ADHD

When a child has both inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive ADHD, there are a variety of ways that the two conditions can combine to offer both opportunities and challenges. Depending on the level at which the disorder is interfering with a child's everyday life and education, a combination of therapies—including medication—may be recommended.

## TREATMENT OPTIONS

Three paths to treatment have proven to be effective with individuals who have ADHD: Behavioral support, medication, or a combination of the two.

## BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT

Providing the right type of support for children can make a significant impact on their ability to keep their attention focused on the task at hand. Methods include:

- Simplifying instructions and tasks to the minimum information needed
- Offering stand-up desks or exercise balls as seating
- Creating simple but achievable “minigoals”

- Immediate and delayed rewards, which give children the incentive to consistently achieve goals
- Rewarding “points” over a series of days, with a reinforcement menu that offers a rotating (and tempting) choice of incentives

## Common Sense Suggestions

These additional recommendations can collectively make a significant difference in helping children with overall executive functioning:

- A healthy diet including as many whole foods as possible to avoid added sugar
- Regular sleep and exercise
- Meditation and biofocus activities, which physically and positively alter the brain
- Schedule and structure, such as a white board with lists to help children track their tasks and responsibilities
- No more than 2 hours of screen time a day

## MEDICATION AND COMBINED THERAPIES

The simplest explanation of how medication works is that most formulations “wake up” the part of the brain that's not functioning properly in people who have ADHD. Many medications for ADHD are stimulants, helping individuals focus and creating confidence in individual decisions about change. Used in moderation, and with regular monitoring of progress, medication can be an effective tool in helping children with ADHD. The most complete solution, however, is a combination of medication and behavioral support to lay the groundwork for life-long success in managing ADHD.



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