

What is ADHD? A Parent's Guide

Children's Services

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.

Introduction

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder which often becomes obvious in early childhood. The behaviours are due to underlying problems of poor attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

Many children, especially under-fives, are inattentive and restless. This does not necessarily mean they have ADHD.

The inattention or hyperactivity becomes a problem when they are exaggerated, compared with other children of the same age, and when they affect the child, their school, social and family life.

How common is ADHD?

About 2% to 5% of school age children can have ADHD.

What causes ADHD?

We do not know exactly what causes these disorders. ADHD can run in families. Other factors potentially having a role in ADHD include:

- Being born prematurely (before the 37th week of pregnancy)
- Having a low birth weight
- Smoking, alcohol or drug abuse during pregnancy

Sometimes parents feel blamed for not having controlled their child, but there is no evidence that poor parenting directly causes ADHD. However, it is important to note that parents can play a crucial role in helping and managing a child with ADHD.

What are the symptoms of ADHD?

Children with problems of attention can appear forgetful, distracted, seeming not to listen, disorganised, taking ages to start doing things and then, when they do, they rarely finish them.

Children with hyperactivity seem restless, fidgety, full of energy 'always on the go'. They may seem loud and noisy with a continuous chatter.

Children with symptoms of impulsivity do things without thinking. They have difficulty waiting for their turn in games or in a queue, and interrupt people in conversation.

Not all children have all the symptoms. This means some can have problems with poor attention, while others are mainly hyperactive.

What other problems can a person with ADHD have?

Children with ADHD can have other problems such as learning difficulties, autism, conduct disorder, anxiety and depression.

Neurological problems like tics (repetitive muscle movements that result in sudden and difficult to control body jolts or sounds), tourettes (tics involving movement and speech lasting longer than a year), and epilepsy can also be present. Children with ADHD also can have problems with coordination and social skills.

What are the long term consequences?

As young people grow into adulthood, they need to be supported to understand and manage their condition. Sometimes people with ADHD can engage in risk-taking behaviours; medication can often help with improving impulsivity, alongside other strategies.

Having a diagnosis of ADHD can affect some career options like joining the armed forces.

Those with ADHD must declare their diagnosis to the DVLA if their ADHD symptoms or medication affect their ability to drive safely.

For children with ADHD, evidence suggests that at 25 years of age:

Approximately 15% retained the full ADHD diagnosis.

Approximately 65% were in 'partial remission' (with persistence of some symptoms and continuing functional impairment, such as psychological, social, or educational difficulties).

Over time, inattentive symptoms tend to persist and hyperactive-impulsive symptoms tend to become less difficult.

How is ADHD diagnosed?

There is no single, simple, definite test for ADHD. Making a diagnosis requires a specialist assessment, usually done by a child psychiatrist or specialist paediatrician.

The diagnosis is made by recognising patterns of behaviour, observing the child and obtaining reports of their behaviour at home and at school.

Sometimes a computerised test may be done to aid the diagnosis.

How will a child with ADHD be treated?

A child who has ADHD needs treatment across all situations where the difficulties occur. This means support and help at home, school, with friends and in the community.

Firstly it is very important for the family, teachers and professionals to understand the child's condition and how it affects them. As they grow up, the young person needs to be aware of their condition and how to manage it.

Teachers and parents may need to use behavioural management strategies. Parents or family may find parent training programmes helpful, especially in managing the defiant behaviours which may co-exist with the child's ADHD.

At school, children may need specific educational support and plans to help with their daily work in the classroom and also with homework. They may also need help to build their confidence and develop their social skills.

It is important that there is good communication between home, school and the professionals treating the child to ensure that the ADHD symptoms are treated as well as possible, and that the child achieves their best potential.

Medications can play an important role in managing ADHD, by helping to reduce hyperactivity and improving concentration. The improved concentration gives the child the opportunity and time to learn and practice new skills.

Children often say that medication helps them to get on with people, to think more clearly, to understand things better and to feel more in control of themselves. Not all children with ADHD will need medication.

What can I do if my child has ADHD?

Children with ADHD can become easily frustrated because of their poor attention span and high energy levels. Some of the following can help manage these difficulties:

- Give simple instructions. Stand near them, look at them and tell them slowly and calmly what you want them to do, rather than shouting across the room
- Praise your child when they have done what is required, however small it is
- If needed, write a list of things to do and put it somewhere where it can be seen clearly (for example, door of their room, bathroom)
- Break down any task, like doing homework or sitting at the dining table, into smaller time spans such as 15 – 20 minutes
- Give them time and activities on which to spend their energy, for example, basketball and swimming

Many parents find it helpful to attend parenting programmes, irrespective of whether their child is being treated for ADHD. Some areas offer parenting programmes and support groups specifically for parents of children with ADHD. This can help you with strategies to manage behaviour that challenges, and set appropriate boundaries.

How do I get help?

Your GP, teacher or school nurse can refer you to a specialist to complete an assessment and offer treatment. They may refer you to a paediatrician (child doctor) or to a child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS).

What are the medications used in the treatment of ADHD?

Medications used to treat ADHD are broadly divided in two groups:

- Stimulants like methylphenidate and lisdexamfetamine
- Non-stimulants like atomoxetine and guanfacine

Stimulants work by increasing activity in the brain particularly in the areas that help control attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

Methylphenidate is available as different forms:

- Immediate release methylphenidate. Its effect lasts for four hours. It is used for its flexibility in dosing and can be used to determine the correct level of dose during dose changes
- Slow or modified-release methylphenidate works for 8 – 12 hours and can be given once a day. They are more convenient, and avoid the need for taking medicine at school

If it is felt that your child's ADHD symptoms are well controlled at home, then stimulant medication (methylphenidate or lisdexamfetamine) does not need to be taken during weekends and school holidays. However please note that non stimulants (atomoxetine or guanfacine) must be taken daily and should not be stopped without discussion with the ADHD team.

Non-stimulant medications also help to control inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity by working through different pathways in the brain. These include medications like atomoxetine and guanfacine. Non stimulant medications will take six weeks to reach full effect and once started, should not be stopped without discussing with the ADHD team.

Which medication will be used for my child?

Stimulant medication methylphenidate is usually prescribed first. The type of stimulant prescribed will depend on a number of things like the symptoms your child has, your choice of treatment, the ease of giving the medication and even availability or cost of the medication.

If methylphenidate causes unpleasant side-effects or does not work, another stimulant (lisdexamfetamine) or non-stimulant medications may be prescribed. Sometimes a child may respond to a different form of methylphenidate.

How do I know it is working?

You will find that:

- Your child's concentration is better
- Their feelings of restlessness or over-activity are less
- They control themselves better

Sometimes school or teachers notice the improvement before you do.

What are the side effects?

As with most medications, there may be some unwanted effects. However, not everyone gets side effects and most side effects are mild and disappear with continued use. Side effects are less likely if the dose is increased gradually when the tablets are started. Some parents worry about addiction, but there is no good evidence to suggest that this is a problem.

Some of the common side effects of methylphenidate include:

- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty falling asleep
- Light headedness

Less common side effects to look out for include:

- Being 'over-focused', quiet and staring; this may be a sign that the dose is too high
- Anxiety, nervousness, irritability or tearfulness
- Tummy pains or feeling sick
- Headache, dizziness or drowsiness
- Tics or twitches
- Sexual dysfunction

In the long term, sometimes growth slows down when children are on methylphenidate.

This list of side-effects is not exhaustive. **If you notice anything unusual, it is important to contact your doctor immediately.**

Is there anything else I need to let the doctor know?

Before you give any medication, do tell your doctor about:

- Allergies your child might have
- Any other medicines they take, including vitamins or supplements
- For older girls if they are likely to become pregnant
- If you or anyone in your family has physical health problems, especially high blood pressure, heart problems and repeated movements (called tics)

Are there any special tests before or while taking the medications?

Before taking the medication, your child should be physically examined especially for their heart rate, blood pressure, growth and any other medical problems. Sometimes they may need a blood test or heart tracing test to measure the electrical activity of the heart called an electrocardiogram (ECG).

While taking the medication, your doctor will monitor your child's heart rate, blood pressure, weight and height on a regular basis along with checking for any side effects.

What do I need to know about giving the medication?

Some helpful things to know:

Do

- Give the medication at the times you were told by your doctor or pharmacist
- Keep appointments for regular review of medication
- Store the medication safely
- Ensure your child swallows the medication and does not chew or crush it
- Make sure your child drinks enough, especially in hot weather and while exercising

Do Not

- Double the dose if they miss a dose of medication
- Stop giving the medication without discussing with the doctor
- Give the medication to anyone else, even if you feel their difficulties are similar to your child's

Resources for ADHD

Name	Tel No.	Website	What is it
ADDISS (National Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service)	020 8952 2800	www.addiss.co.uk www.adders.org www.adhdfoundation.org.uk	Provides information and support for parents and children with ADHD.
ADHD Resource		www.adhdandyou.co.uk	Resource centres with lots of practical tips for home and school for a range of difficulties associated with ADHD.
Cerebra Sleep Service	0800 328 1159 01267244200	www.cerebra.org.uk	Offers help and advice on overcoming sleep problems such as anxiety at night and not being able to get to sleep.
Contact a Family	0808 808 3555	www.cafamily.org.uk	UK-wide charity providing advice, information and support to the parents of all disabled children.

English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowałiby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。