

ADHD: Facts for Families

What are the symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

The signs and symptoms of ADHD in children and teens include age inappropriate:

- Inattention (off-task, distractible, trouble completing homework), and/or
- Hyperactivity (“on the go” or restless)
- Impulsivity (butts into conversation, acts without thinking)

To be diagnosed with ADHD your child’s symptoms must:

- Be present for at least 6 months and before the age of 12
- Cause problems at home, school or with peers

How common is ADHD?

ADHD is a very common problem. It affects about 1 out of 10 children. Children with ADHD display a wide range of problems from mild to serious. They often have other psychiatric, medical and learning problems.

What causes ADHD?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder, which means there is impairment of the growth and development of the brain or central nervous system. There is often a strong genetic component (passed from parent to child). One out of four children with ADHD has another close family member with the disorder.

What is the impact of ADHD?

Although symptoms often lessen and change over time, more than half of children with ADHD continue to have the disorder during the teenage years. If it is untreated, teens with ADHD have a higher chance of school failure and dropout, substance or alcohol abuse and delinquency (breaking the law). Teens and adults with untreated ADHD, as well as family members of children with ADHD, have a higher chance of developing other mental health problems over time, such as depression, anxiety or substance abuse disorders.

How is ADHD diagnosed?

The diagnosis of ADHD is made by a healthcare provider who gathers information about your child from many sources (such as parents and teachers). They will also consider other disorders that can look similar to or co-occur with ADHD, identify your child’s strengths and weaknesses, and develop a treatment plan. There is no single “test” for ADHD.

Rating scales can be used to screen for ADHD symptoms and other disorders. Often, the same or similar rating scales will also be used during treatment to see how well it is working.

To Learn More

- Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine
206-987-2164
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org
- chadd.org
- help4adhd.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



How is ADHD treated?

Behavioral therapy and medicine are the treatments that work best for youth with ADHD. They are described below.

Behavioral therapy

In behavioral therapy, you and your child's teachers are taught how to work with your child on:

- Increasing positive interactions and using rewards to encourage good behaviors
- Making clear rules and consistently enforcing them
- Increasing structure at home and school
- Giving clear and appropriate commands
- Using time out from positive reinforcement to discourage bad behaviors
- Using a daily home-school note to motivate the child at school and communicate between school and home

Medicine

In most cases, stimulant medicines will be tried first to treat ADHD. There are two types of stimulant medicines used to treat symptoms: methylphenidate products (such as Ritalin, Concerta and Daytrana) or amphetamine products (such as Adderall, Vyvanse). These medicines come in many different forms and are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for treating ADHD. Some have effects that last almost 16 hours, while others last for a much shorter period time. There are also non-stimulant medicines that are approved by the FDA for treatment of ADHD that act differently on the body and have different side effects.

Is treatment helpful?

ADHD treatment is most effective when it is coordinated with your child's caregivers, school and primary care provider. For many families, the recommended treatment begins with parent education about ADHD and parenting. Finding the right dose and type of medicine is often recommended for school aged children. Most children being treated with both medicines and behavior therapy show major improvements.

Symptoms of ADHD often change, as children get older, as do goals for treatment. Thus, we recommend that your child get re-evaluated from time to time and that the treatment plan is updated. This is especially helpful during transitions, such as elementary to middle school and middle to high school.

How can I help my child succeed at school?

Your child may be eligible to receive a 504 plan or an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) so they can receive accommodations and support to reduce the impact of ADHD on their school success. You can request a meeting with school staff to discuss whether your child may be eligible for one of these plans.