

Understanding Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)



This resource will help you better understand your condition and outlines some effective ways to manage it.



Key points:

- 💡 **Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)** is a developmental disorder characterized by persistent difficulty with inattention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity.
- 💡 To be diagnosed with ADHD, the symptoms must negatively affect your functioning in daily life, whether at home, at work or school, or in social relationships.
- 💡 ADHD is a common and **highly treatable medical condition**. It is not a personal weakness or a sign of low intelligence.
- 💡 Medications for the treatment of ADHD have been very well studied and are highly effective. Some other treatment modalities, such as coaching, might also be helpful for some individuals.

What is ADHD?

Everyone occasionally feels more easily distracted, inattentive, or restless. However, when these experiences are persistent and impact your ability to function normally, that may indicate the presence of ADHD. Typically, people diagnosed with ADHD find it difficult to concentrate. They are often disorganized, struggle to complete tasks, and interrupt others. They may have trouble in work and social relationships because they can be impulsive, impatient, and short-tempered or irritable. **The right care plan can help you manage your symptoms, change the way you feel, and empower you to live the life you want.**

ADHD is a **neurodevelopmental** condition, which means it starts in childhood when the nervous system is developing. Symptoms of ADHD commonly persist into adulthood, although they often change with age.

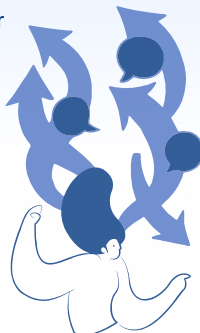
There are many ADHD symptoms, so each individual may present differently. To be diagnosed with ADHD, several typical symptoms must have been present before the age of 12 (even if you weren't diagnosed as a child), and symptoms must currently cause you significant distress and impair your functioning in at least two settings (e.g., at work, school, home, or socially).

ADHD commonly co-occurs with **other health problems** (comorbidities), including mood and anxiety disorders and substance use disorders. **To get well and stay well, it's essential to have the right diagnosis and receive treatment that's personalized for your unique needs.**

How do I know I have ADHD?

What does inattention look like in adults with ADHD?

- Having persistent difficulty paying close attention to details, making careless mistakes, or failing to follow through on commitments or complete tasks
- Having persistent difficulty listening attentively
- Having persistent difficulty organizing tasks and activities or following instructions
- Avoiding tasks that demand extensive thought and focus
- Being easily distracted
- Frequently forgetting usual obligations
- Frequently losing or misplacing possessions
- Frequent driving infractions due to inattention



What does hyperactivity-impulsivity look like in adults with ADHD?

- Frequently fidgeting, tapping hands or feet, or shifting in your seat
- Having difficulty remaining seated (e.g., work meetings)
- Feeling restless and having difficulty unwinding or relaxing
- Talking excessively; monopolizing conversations
- Being impatient about waiting your turn
- Frequently interrupting or intruding on others
- Frequent accidents or driving infractions due to impulsivity
- Impulsivity can lead to misuse of substances, excessive spending, or engaging in unsafe sex.

This handout is intended for general educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult a qualified healthcare provider for information regarding a medical condition.

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RAPIDS

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How is ADHD treated?

Treatment goals: To manage ADHD symptoms to optimize functioning and quality of life.

Medication

- The decision to take any treatment is deeply personal, but it's important to have access to high-quality medical information to help guide your decision.
- Medication is often very helpful for managing ADHD symptoms and improving functioning.
- Classes of medications: stimulants (e.g., dexamphetamine and methylphenidate) and non-stimulants (atomoxetine and guanfacine XR)
- ADHD treatment guidelines recommend trying long-acting stimulant medications first, especially because one dose in the morning usually lasts throughout the day, when it's needed most.
- If you've never tried an ADHD treatment, usually one long-acting stimulant is tried first (dexamphetamine or methylphenidate). If the first choice is not working optimally or it's causing persistent side effects, the other stimulant type should be tried.
- Treatment choice could be influenced by what you've tried before—and whether it helped and was well tolerated.
- **Personalization:** For all psychiatric diagnoses, finding the right treatment often requires trial and error, because everyone has unique needs. Several stimulant medications have robust evidence for safety and efficacy. Each one has a unique profile, with differences in dosage forms (e.g., tablet/chewable/capsule that can be sprinkled on food or in drink) and duration of effect—some last longer than others. Your healthcare provider can help you choose a medication that is most likely to manage your symptoms and minimize unwanted side effects.



Understanding Stimulant Use for ADHD

At first glance, using "stimulation" to treat ADHD might seem counterintuitive—especially if you're already dealing with hyperactivity. However, medications in the stimulant group, including dexamphetamine and methylphenidate, are actually the most effective treatments for ADHD symptoms, including hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattention.



ADHD and Other Conditions

If you have other psychiatric diagnoses besides ADHD, such as a mood or anxiety disorder, your healthcare provider will typically prioritize managing your most serious, impairing condition first. For instance, it's common for bipolar disorder and ADHD to co-occur, but bipolar disorder is always managed first, before treatments for ADHD are considered. However, if ADHD is associated with relatively mild depression or anxiety symptoms, the treatment of ADHD might be prioritized.

Psychological Therapies

- Unlike almost any other psychiatric disorder, talk therapies are not a top treatment option for ADHD. Sometimes, especially when there are comorbid conditions, like depression, anxiety or substance use, talk therapy can be extremely valuable.
- Talk therapy can help you develop more effective coping skills, improve relationships, manage anxiety, and promote overall well-being.
- Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is the most established form of psychological therapy for ADHD.
- Despite limited high-quality evidence, some people report benefit from ADHD coaching, which is really about education, encouragement and instilling hope.

Complementary Therapies

- These are options that are supported by scientific evidence and may complement medication and talk therapy.
- Common options include regular physical activity, yoga, and mindfulness meditation.
- Physical activity is a really important part of ADHD management and doesn't take as much time as most people think. Thirty minutes of mild to moderate physical activity (e.g., a brisk walk) five times a week can have a meaningful impact on the brain chemicals that reduce anxiety and promote concentration and overall well-being.

