

Understanding ADHD



What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

ADHD is a common neurodevelopmental difference that can make focusing, staying still, and managing impulses challenging. ADHD can be diagnosed as predominantly inattentive (previously known as ADD), predominantly hyperactive or combined type. As such, ADHD might look different for different people.

With the right strategies and support, individuals with ADHD can thrive and leverage their unique strengths. Approximately 6 to 8% of children and adolescents are identified with ADHD, with boys being two to three times more likely to be diagnosed compared to girls.

Main Features of ADHD

Inattention:

- Difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities.
- Frequent mistakes in schoolwork or other activities.
- Often seems not to listen when spoken to directly.
- Trouble organising tasks and activities.
- Easily distracted and often forgetful in daily activities.
- Frequently loses items necessary for tasks or activities.
- Avoids or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort.

Hyperactivity and Impulsivity:

- Fidgeting with or tapping hands or feet, squirming in seat.
- Leaving seat in situations where remaining seated is expected.
- Running or climbing in inappropriate situations.

- Unable to play or engage in activities quietly.
- Often “on the go” or acting as if “driven by a motor.”
- Talking excessively.
- Trouble waiting one’s turn.

To be diagnosed with ADHD, these features must be present for at least six months, be inconsistent with the individual’s developmental level, and cause significant difficulties for the person at school, work, or in social settings.

What causes ADHD?

The exact cause of ADHD is not fully understood, but research suggests that it results from a combination of factors such as genetics, brain structure differences, prenatal exposures, and early life stressors.



Misconceptions of ADHD

- **ADHD is over-diagnosed:** Increased awareness and understanding often lead to more diagnoses. However, underdiagnosis and lack of appropriate support are more prevalent issues.
- **Stimulant medications are addictive:** These medications are generally safe and effective when used as prescribed. The risk of addiction is low when used appropriately.
- **Sugar causes ADHD:** Multiple scientific studies have found no direct link between sugar intake and the development or exacerbation of ADHD.
- **ADHD is a result of poor parenting:** ADHD has a strong genetic component and is not caused by bad parenting or a lack of discipline.
- **ADHD is just about being hyperactive:** While hyperactivity is a trait associated with ADHD, it also involves issues with attention, focus, and impulse control.
- **ADHD is only diagnosed in boys:** Historically, ADHD was more frequently diagnosed in boys due to noticeable hyperactivity and impulsivity. Girls with ADHD, who might present with more inattentive traits, were often underdiagnosed or misdiagnosed.
- **People with ADHD are more likely to misbehave:** ADHD involves underlying brain function differences related to attention, impulse control, and executive functioning. These traits are not deliberate misbehaviour but are linked to brain-based differences.
- **People with ADHD are just lazy or unmotivated:** Difficulties with organisation, focus, and follow-through are typically due to neurobiological factors, not a lack of effort or motivation.
- **ADHD is a childhood condition:** ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition that persists throughout adolescence and adulthood. Many adults with ADHD who were not diagnosed during childhood may continue to encounter challenges related to these traits.
- **People with ADHD can't focus:** People with ADHD can experience periods of hyperfocus, becoming intensely absorbed in specific tasks, which can mask their overall challenges with attention and distractibility.

Practical Guidance

- **Establish Routines:** Consistent daily routines provide structure and predictability, helping reduce anxiety and improve focus.
- **Utilise Tools and Technology:** Planners, reminder apps, and other organisational tools help manage daily tasks and responsibilities.
- **Break Tasks into Manageable Steps:** Simplifying tasks into smaller steps prevents feeling overwhelmed and makes large projects more approachable.
- **Create a Supportive Environment:** A quiet, distraction-free area enhances concentration and productivity.
- **Set Realistic Goals:** Break down larger goals into smaller milestones. Celebrating progress along the way provides a sense of accomplishment.
- **Practice Self-Care:** Regular exercise, adequate sleep, and mindfulness practices are crucial in managing ADHD.
- **Build a Support Network:** Connect with friends, family, or support groups who understand and affirm your experiences.
- **Seek Professional Support:** Therapy or coaching tailored to your needs can offer personalised strategies and guidance.

Useful Resources

Understanding ADHD and seeking the right support can make a significant difference. If you have further questions or need additional assistance, please refer to the resources listed or consult with a healthcare provider

The Neurodivergence Skills Workbook for Autism and ADHD

The Neurodivergent Woman Podcast
ndwomanpod.com

How to ADHD
howtoadhd.com

Autism and ADHD
autistica.org.uk/what-is-autism/adhd-and-autism

ADHD
healthdirect.gov.au/amp/article/attention-deficit-disorder-add-or-adhd

ADHD: Supporting Children and Pre-teens
raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/development/adhd/managing-adhd-5-11-years



It's natural to feel overwhelmed or unsure after an ADHD or autism diagnosis. Remember, you are not alone. Support groups, counselling, and connecting with others who share similar experiences can be incredibly reassuring.