

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

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Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition that becomes apparent in some children in the preschool and early school years. It is hard for these children to control their behavior and/or pay attention. It is estimated that between 3 and 5 percent of children have ADHD, or approximately 2 million children in the United States.

The principal characteristics of ADHD are **inattention**, **hyperactivity**, and **impulsivity**. These symptoms appear early in a child's life. Symptoms of ADHD will appear over the course of many months, often with the symptoms of impulsiveness and hyperactivity preceding those of inattention, which may not emerge for a year or more. **Different symptoms may appear in different settings**, depending on the demands the situation may pose for the child's self-control. All children are sometimes restless, sometimes act without thinking, and sometimes daydream the time away. **When the child's hyperactivity, distractibility, poor concentration, or impulsivity begin to affect performance in school, social relationships with other children, or behavior at home, ADHD may be suspected.** But because the symptoms vary so much across settings, ADHD is not easy to diagnose. This is especially true when inattentiveness is the primary symptom.

According to the most recent version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-TR), there are **three recognized subtypes** of ADHD. These are the **predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type** (that does not show significant inattention); the **predominantly inattentive type** (that does not show significant hyperactive-impulsive behavior) sometimes called ADD—an outdated term for this entire disorder; and the **combined type** (that displays both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive symptoms).

Because everyone shows some of these behaviors at times, the diagnosis requires that such behavior be demonstrated to a degree that is inappropriate for the person's age. The diagnostic guidelines also contain specific requirements for determining when the symptoms indicate ADHD. The behaviors must appear early in life, before age 7, and continue for at least 6 months. Above all, **the behaviors must create a real handicap in at least two areas of a person's life such as in the schoolroom, on the playground, at home, in the community, or in social settings.**

The following **disorders sometimes accompany ADHD**: Learning Disabilities; Tourette Syndrome; Oppositional Defiant Disorder; Conduct Disorder; Anxiety and Depression; Bipolar Disorder

Stimulant medication is the most efficient and cost effective method of treating ADHD. Methods of treatment usually involve some combination of medications, behavior modifications, life style changes, and counseling. Behavioral parent training, behavior therapy aimed at parents to help them understand ADHD has also shown short term benefits.

Expert in ADHD? DSES is always looking for volunteers to help teach or give presentations!!

Resources and Additional Information

National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov