

A guide to ADHD

What is ADHD?

ADHD stands for 'attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder' and is generally considered as the most common childhood developmental condition in the world. In the UK it is thought that around 5% of school aged children have ADHD. Recently, there has been an increase in adults being diagnosed with ADHD, especially women. This is thought to be due to more awareness, differences in symptoms (compared to males), and more research into the condition.

ADHD is diagnosed as one of three sub-categories:

- **Hyperactive-impulsive:** The least common presentation (15%). People can struggle with sitting still or staying quiet. It may feel like the need to constantly move, fidget or tap your feet, which can make it difficult to focus on tasks or engage in conversations. They may also struggle with impulsivity, acting without thinking about the consequences, and interrupting others while they're speaking.
- **Inattentive:** The second most common presentation (20-30%). People can be easily distracted by external stimuli or their own thoughts. This can lead to forgetfulness, difficulty completing tasks and poor time management skills. ADHD in females often presents as inattentive.
- **Combination:** The most common presentation (50-75%). People will exhibit a combination of the hyperactive-impulsive traits and the inattentive one.

ADHD types

Hyperactive

- Always on the go
- Talks a lot
- Restless mind



Inattentive

- Easily distracted
- Often lost in thought
- Forgets things



Combined

- Mix of traits
- Distracted and restless
- varies day to day



What causes ADHD?



ADHD has no single cause and likely results from multiple factors. Research shows that ADHD is not simply a behaviour disorder. Individuals often show delayed development in specific brain regions, affecting self-management and executive functions. ADHD is not a 'chemical imbalance'. The brain functions through electrical signals which rely on chemical neurotransmitters to bridge the gaps.

In ADHD, these chemicals may be released in insufficient amounts or too quickly, disrupting communication. Medications can help improve this process.

ADHD often runs in families, indicating a genetic component, though no single gene has been identified as the cause.

Traits of ADHD

- Difficulty following instructions or completing tasks
- Forgetting instructions or things they need to do
- Difficulty sticking to an activity, but the ability to hyper-focus on an interesting task
- Being easily distracted
- Difficulty organising themselves
- Difficulty regulating their emotions
- Difficulty sitting still; being restless or fidgety
- Talking over people or not being able to stop talking
- Appear to not be listening
- Difficulty waiting or taking turns
- Ability for extraordinary recall of information
- Less prone to worry about consequences, so they may be more inclined to try new things
- Ability to think outside the box and in innovative ways
- Often highly creative and practical
- May have sensory processing issues, finding light, smell, touch and taste overwhelming, and either avoiding or seeking sensory stimulation.

Remember, each subtype of ADHD will present with different challenges.

Myths

Sometimes, misconceptions or inaccurate information about ADHD circulate. Here are a few examples:

- ADHD is not a real neurodevelopmental condition
- ADHD is caused by bad parenting
- Too much TV, gaming or screen time can cause ADHD (it can exacerbate the symptoms but it's not the cause)
- Only boys have ADHD
- More exercise and better diet will cure ADHD
- People with ADHD just need to try harder



Rejection sensitivity dysphoria (RSD)

The ADHD brain struggles to regulate emotions, which can be intense and change rapidly. Feelings of rejection or embarrassment can feel physically painful. People with ADHD often react strongly to criticism, rejection, or humiliation. This can lead to fear of failure, mood swings, negative self-beliefs, and avoidance of challenges. Importantly, even perceived rejection, whether real or imagined, can trigger the same emotional impact.

Understanding RSD (rejection sensitivity dysphoria)



Medication

Medication is a common treatment option for people with ADHD. Stimulant medications are often prescribed as they can help increase focus, reduce impulsivity and improve organisation skills. It is important to note that sometimes people can experience the 'rebound effect'. This is a flare of ADHD symptoms at the time the stimulant medication wears off, often mid to late afternoon (which can possibly coincide with unit meetings). The rebound effect can result in behaviour changes such as an increase in activity, feeling fatigued, and intense emotions.

Strategies for unit meetings

- Utilise checklists and visual timetables
- Complete an adjustment plan
- Give lots of encouragement and praise
- Avoid telling off for something that is due to their ADHD
- Provide written and visual instructions
- Give lots of reminders
- Provide time to run around and recalibrate
- Provide rest time
- Allow the use of/provide aids such as fidget toys, wobble cushions, doodle pads etc
- Access further support if needed

Remember you can get help with the costs for inclusive materials and resources. This may be available in your country and region, or with the accessible guiding grant from HQ.

Useful contacts

ADDITUDE

additudemag.com

ADHD UK

adhduk.co.uk