

## **ATTENTION-DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER**

### **(ADHD)**

#### Symptoms

These are the symptoms required for a diagnosis of ADHD, based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM5). Symptoms must be present in more than one setting (e.g., home and school) and must be present for more than 6 months. There are 3 presentations of ADHD based on which set of symptoms are present: Predominantly Hyperactive/Impulsive Presentation, Predominantly Inattentive Presentation, and Combined Presentation.

For children, 6 or more symptoms in a given area must be present; for adults, 5 or more symptoms in a given area must be present.

#### Hyperactive/Impulsive Symptoms

- Squirms when seated or fidgets with hands and feet
- Marked restlessness that is difficult to control
- Appears to be driven by "a motor" or is often "on the go"
- Lacks ability to play and engage in leisure activities quietly
- Difficulty staying seated in class
- Overly talkative
- Difficulty waiting turn
- Interrupts others' conversations and activities
- Impulsively blurts out answers before questions are completed

#### Inattentive Symptoms

- Poor listening skills
- Loses and/or misplaces items needed to complete tasks
- Sidetracked by external or unimportant stimuli
- Forgets daily activities
- Diminished attention span

- Lacks ability to complete schoolwork or other tasks or to follow instructions
- Avoids or is disinclined to begin homework or activities requiring concentration
- Fails to focus on details; makes thoughtless mistakes in schoolwork

### Things to Consider

ADHD is far more than not being able to sit still and can cause serious difficulties in daily life, both with academic and with non-academic tasks. Individuals with ADHD struggle with executive functioning skills including planning, time-management, organization, and memory. One of the biggest struggles in ADHD is working memory, or the ability to hold information in your mind long enough to use it; without working memory, information is 'in one ear and out the other.' This is why individuals with ADHD sometimes immediately forget what you had asked them to do, even when they agreed to do it. ADHD and difficulties with executive functioning can make even simple everyday tasks more difficult.

ADHD is not really a *deficit* in attention, but rather an inability to *regulate* attention. For individuals with ADHD, the brain is taking in far more information from the environment, seeking something that is interesting or otherwise reinforcing; the person with ADHD does not have control over this, it simply is how their brain works. Their brain will go to whatever is most interesting at the time...which means if they are doing a preferred activity (like playing video games) they will show no distraction and will be able to pay attention to the game, possibly for hours. But they will struggle significantly when it is time to try to force their brain to focus on things that may be important but are much less interesting.

### Treatment

Because ADHD is due to brain differences, medication is the front line treatment. Medication can significantly reduce problems related to impulsivity, distractibility, and executive functioning; this leads to greater success and reduces the burden that is otherwise associated with everyday tasks. But medication for ADHD is only part of a successful treatment plan. Individuals with ADHD will

need direct instruction and guidance in how to develop and maintain executive skills related to planning, time-management, organization, and memory.

For more in-depth information about ADHD, see the "Pre-recorded Video" section of this website.

If you or a loved one struggles with ADHD, know that there is hope. If available, talk to your physician, contact your local community mental health clinic, or seek a therapist; if you do not have access to these things, continue seeking information from reliable sources on the internet or via books on Amazon or from your local library. The good news is that there are many strategies you can learn to use simply by accessing mental health education.

**If you are experiencing suicidal ideations, DIAL 988 (the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) to call, text, or chat with a trained counselor.**