

ADHD

What Is ADHD?

ADHD stands for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. It is a medical condition. A person with ADHD has differences in brain development and brain activity that affect attention, the ability to sit still, and self-control. ADHD can affect a child at school, at home, and in friendships.

What Are the Signs of ADHD?

All kids struggle at times to pay attention, listen and follow directions, sit still, or wait their turn. But for kids with ADHD, the struggles are harder and happen more often.

Kids with ADHD can show signs in any or all these areas:

- **Inattentive.** Kids who are inattentive (easily distracted) have trouble focusing their attention, concentrating, and staying on task. They may not listen well to directions, may miss important details, and may not finish what they start. They may daydream or dawdle too much. They may seem absent-minded or forgetful, and lose track of their things.
- **Hyperactive.** Kids who are hyperactive are fidgety, restless, and easily bored. They may have trouble sitting still, or staying quiet when needed. They may rush through things and make careless mistakes. They may climb, jump, or roughhouse when they shouldn't. Without meaning to, they may act in ways that disrupt others.
- **Impulsive.** Kids who are impulsive act too quickly before thinking. They often interrupt, might push or grab, and find it hard to wait. They may do things without asking for permission, take things that aren't theirs, or act in ways that are risky. They may have emotional reactions that seem too intense for the situation.

Sometimes parents and teachers notice signs of ADHD when a child is very young. But it's normal for little kids to be distracted, restless, impatient, or impulsive — these things don't always mean that a child has ADHD.

Attention, activity, and self-control develop little by little, as children grow. Kids learn these skills with help from parents and teachers. But some kids don't get much better at paying attention, settling down, listening, or waiting. When these things continue and begin to cause problems at school, home, and with friends, it may be ADHD.

What Causes ADHD?

It's not clear what causes the brain differences of ADHD. There's strong evidence that ADHD is mostly inherited. Many kids who have ADHD have a parent or relative with it. Kids also can be more at risk for it if they were born early, are exposed to environmental toxins, or their mothers used drugs during pregnancy.

ADHD is not caused by too much screen time, poor parenting, or eating too much sugar.

How Is ADHD Diagnosed?

If you think your child has ADHD, make an appointment with your child's doctor. They will do a checkup, including a vision and hearing check, to be sure something else isn't causing the symptoms.

To diagnose ADHD, doctors start by asking about a child's health, behavior, and activity. They talk with parents and kids about the things they have noticed. Your doctor might ask you to complete checklists about your child's behavior, and might ask you to give your child's teacher a checklist too.

After getting this information, doctors diagnose ADHD if it's clear that:

- A child's trouble with paying attention, hyperactivity, or impulsivity go beyond what's usual for their age.
- The behaviors have been going on since the child was young.
- The behaviors affect the child at school and at home.
- A health check shows that another health or learning issue isn't causing the problems.

Many kids with ADHD also have learning problems, oppositional and defiant behaviors, or mood and anxiety problems. Doctors usually treat these along with the ADHD.

The doctor can refer you to a child psychologist or psychiatrist, if needed.

How Is ADHD Treated?

Treatment for ADHD usually includes:

- **Medicine.** This activates the brain's ability to pay attention, slow down, and use more self-control.
- **Behavior therapy.** Therapists can help kids develop the social, emotional, and planning skills that are lagging with ADHD.
- **Parent coaching.** Through coaching, parents learn the best ways to respond to behavior problems that are part of ADHD.
- **School support.** Teachers can help kids with ADHD do well and enjoy school more.

The right treatment helps ADHD improve. Parents and teachers can teach younger kids to get better at managing their attention, behavior, and emotions. As they grow older, kids should learn to improve their own attention and self-control.

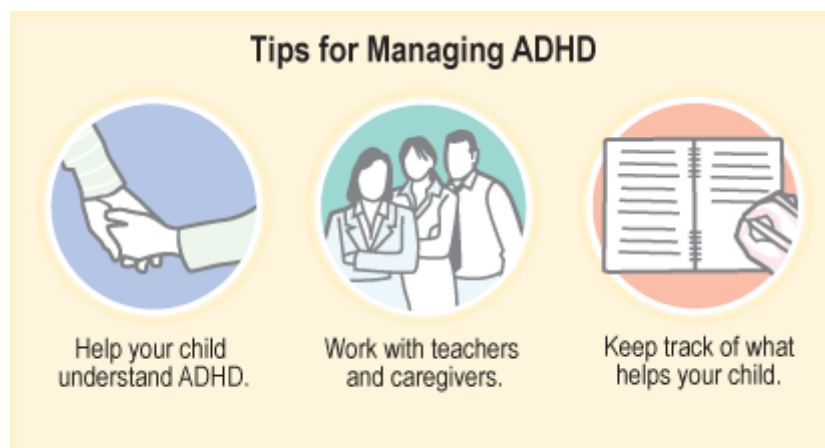
When ADHD is not treated, it can be hard for kids to succeed. This may lead to low self-esteem, depression, oppositional behavior, school failure, risk-taking behavior, or family conflict.

How Can Parents Help?

If your child is diagnosed with ADHD:

- **Be involved.** Learn all you can about ADHD. Follow the treatment your child's health care provider recommends. Go to all recommended therapy visits.
- **Give medicines safely.** If your child is taking ADHD medicine, always give it at the recommended time and dose. Keep medicines in a safe place.
- **Work with your child's school.** Ask teachers if your child should have an IEP or 504 plan. Meet often with teachers to find out how your child is doing. Work together to help your child do well
- **Parent with purpose and warmth.** Learn what parenting approaches are best for a child with ADHD — and which can make ADHD worse. Talk openly and supportively about ADHD with your child. Focus on your child's strengths and positive qualities.
- **Connect with others for support and awareness.** Join a support group like CHADD for ADHD to get updates on treatment and other information.

ADHD can improve when kids get treatment, eat healthy food, get enough sleep and exercise, and have supportive parents who know how to respond to ADHD.



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