

What Every Thorough ADHD Diagnosis Includes



From the ADHD Experts at

ADDITUDE

Strategies and Support *for* ADHD & LD

ADDITUDE

Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

A trusted source of advice and information for families touched by attention-deficit disorder—
and a voice of inspiration to help people with ADHD find success at home, at school, and on the job.

ADDitudeMag.com

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What Every Thorough ADHD Diagnosis Includes

What diagnostic tests and procedures should ADHD professionals use to evaluate symptoms? Learn what a thorough, credible ADHD evaluation looks like.

There is no definitive way to check for ADHD. No blood test or electroencephalogram reading. No CAT or PET scan. No X-ray or psychological testing score.

There is, however, a logical set of steps that lead to a formal diagnosis. These steps begin with your own recollection of your life, confirmed and amplified (particularly when diagnosing ADHD in a child) by the observations of those close to you: parents, spouse, teachers, siblings, friends. A thorough evaluation will invite the input and observations of many people, all weighed in the context of the symptoms outlined below.

ADHD Symptoms

Doctors diagnose ADHD on the basis of detailed criteria spelled out in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. In its entry on ADHD, *DSM-V* lists nine symptoms that suggest inattentive ADHD and nine that suggest hyperactivity/impulsivity ADHD in children:

INATTENTIVE

1. Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, at work, or with other activities.
2. Often has trouble holding attention on tasks or play activities.

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3. Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.
4. Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (e.g., loses focus, side-tracked).
5. Often has trouble organizing tasks and activities.
6. Often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to do tasks that require mental effort over a long period of time (such as schoolwork or homework).
7. Often loses things necessary for tasks and activities (e.g. school materials, pencils, books, tools, wallets, keys, paperwork, eyeglasses, mobile telephones).
8. Is often easily distracted
9. Is often forgetful in daily activities.

Find an ADHD specialist in your area at directory.additudemag.com.

HYPERACTIVE/IMPULSIVE

1. Often fidgets with or taps hands or feet, or squirms in seat. Often leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected
2. Often runs about or climbs in situations where it is not appropriate (adolescents or adults may be limited to feeling restless).
3. Often unable to play or take part in leisure activities quietly.
4. Is often “on the go” acting as if “driven by a motor.”
5. Often talks excessively.
6. Often blurts out an answer before a question has been completed.
7. Often has trouble waiting his/her turn.
8. Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations or games)

Almost every child will exhibit one or more of these symptoms at some point. A child may be diagnosed with ADHD only if he or she exhibits at least six of nine symptoms from one of the lists above, and if the symptoms have been noticeable for at least six months in two or more settings — for example, at home and at school. What’s more, the symptoms must significantly impair the child’s academic, social, or work functioning, and at least some of the symptoms must have been apparent before the age of 12.

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ADHD Assessment Checklist

A thorough ADHD evaluation can take anywhere from one to eight hours, and may require several appointments. If your doctor makes a diagnosis without following the steps below, speak up — or find a new doctor. And remember that productive treatment hinges on an accurate diagnosis.

Clinical Interview

Your doctor should begin her ADHD consultation with an in-depth clinical interview comprising the following for your child or for you:

- What a typical day looks like
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Recent big life events, like a divorce or move
- Parenting style or behavior challenges
- Strengths and weaknesses

Medical History

Next, your doctor should collect a thorough medical history that reflects:

- **Genetics**
 - Familial history of ADHD, including parents, siblings, and close relatives
- **Prenatal issues**
 - Low birth weight
 - Maternal alcohol or nicotine consumption
- **Environmental factors**
 - Possible exposure to pesticides, lead, or other common toxins
- **Childhood milestones**
 - Language development
 - Development of social skills
- **Previous medical issues**
 - Injuries or accidents
 - Mental health concerns

It is best if at least two people relate your history to the doctor. People with ADHD are poor self-observers. The history will be much more reliable if another person is present to corroborate, enlarge upon, or give a different point of view about what you say.

DIAGNOSIS GONE WRONG? LEARN ABOUT COMMON DIAGNOSIS MISTAKES DOCTORS MAKE AT [HTTP://ADDITUDE/MISTAKES](http://additude.com/mistakes)

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In the case of children, the history should be taken from the child, from parents, and from schoolteachers' written or telephoned reports. With adults, the history should be taken from the individual in question as well as his or her spouse, or a friend or relative. If available, documents from the elementary or high school or college you attended can fill out your history.

ADHD Rating Scales

Rating scales are used to screen for the presence and severity of ADHD symptoms at home and at school. Parents and teachers must fill out separate rating scales to evaluate a child in different environments. Adults can fill out their own rating scale.

Commonly used rating scales for children:

- Vanderbilt ADHD Diagnostic Teacher Rating Scale
- Conners' Rating Scales—Revised (CRS-R)
- Conners-Wells' Adolescent Self-Report Scale

Commonly used rating scales for adults:

- Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale (ASRS)
- Conners' Adult ADHD Rating Scale (CAARS)
- Barkley Adult ADHD Rating Scale (BAARS)
- Brown Attention-Deficit Disorder Symptom Assessment Scale (BADDS) for Adults

Ruling Out Other Diagnoses

ADHD has many “look-alike” conditions. Your doctor should probe to decisively rule out conditions including the following:

- Learning disabilities (<http://additu.de/learning-disabilities>)
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (<http://additu.de/ocd>)
- Depression (<http://additu.de/depress>)
- Bipolar disorder (<http://additu.de/bipolar>)
- Anxiety (<http://additu.de/anxious>)
- Sleep apnea (<http://additu.de/sleep>)
- Seizure disorders (<http://additu.de/128>)
- Low iron levels (<http://additu.de/7q>)

GETTING AN ADHD DIAGNOSIS ISN'T ALWAYS A RELIEF.
LEARN ABOUT THE EMOTIONAL SIDE OF THE DIAGNOSTIC PROCESS AT [HTTP://ADDITU.DE/REGRET](http://additu.de/regret)

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Making a Diagnosis

If after reviewing all this information, your physician decides (1) that you have the symptoms of ADHD, (2) you have had them since childhood, (3) you have the symptoms in at least two life settings (at school, at home, with peers, and so on), and (4) there is no other diagnosis that can explain your symptoms, then a presumptive diagnosis of ADHD can be made.

**ADHD MAY LOOK
DIFFERENT IN
WOMEN. TAKE A
SELF-TEST AT [HTTP://
ADDITU.DE/15T](http://additu.de/15T)**

**7 Biggest
ADHD Diagnosis
Mistakes
Doctors Make**

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ADDitude Special Reports Available Now

www.adhdreports.com

ADHD 101

A complete overview of ADHD, outlining every step from diagnosis to treatment—all the way to living successfully with attention deficit.

From the moment you suspect ADHD in yourself or your child, you have hundreds of questions. Which doctors can evaluate symptoms? What medication side effects should you be prepared for? Can diet help? This comprehensive eBook has over 100 pages of expert advice, personal stories, and more to help you become an ADHD expert.

>> Learn More About This Special Report: <http://additu.de/adhd-101>

9 Conditions Often Diagnosed with ADHD

Depression. Bipolar Disorder. Anxiety. OCD. And five more conditions that often show up alongside attention deficit.

About 80 percent of individuals with ADHD are diagnosed with at least one other psychiatric condition at some time in their lives. This in-depth special report looks at the nine most common, outlining symptoms, treatment strategies, and differentiating features of each. Plus, strategies for living well with any mental health condition.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/related>

Mindfulness and Other Natural Treatments

The best non-medical treatments for ADHD, including exercise, green time, and mindful meditation.

Learn how mindfulness works on ADHD brains, and how to begin practicing it today. Plus, research the benefits of other alternative treatments like yoga and deep breathing exercises—including some designed especially for kids—as well as the science behind each natural therapy.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/mindfulness>

To purchase these or other ADDitude Special Reports, go to www.adhdreports.com

FREE ADDitude Downloadable Booklets

Does Your Child Have a Learning Disability?

Use this self-test to find out if your child's problems at school may be due to LD.

Is It Depression?

Depression is a serious mood disorder, but it's not always easy to recognize.

Who Can Treat ADHD?

Doctor? Psychiatrist? Coach? Learn who can treat your attention deficit.

You Know You Have ADHD When...

Real ADHDers share personal stories highlighting the lighter side of living with attention deficit.

Is It Adult ADHD?

Habitually disorganized? Always running late? It could be ADHD.

Homework Help for ADHD Children

Addressing homework problems is critical – here's how to do it.

Smart Comebacks

Witty responses to ADHD doubters.

Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:

<http://additu.de/freedownloads>

FREE ADHD Webinar Replays from ADDitude:

Neurofeedback and Cognitive Training for ADHD Kids

>> <http://additu.de/neuro>

Is brain training—including neurofeedback and cognitive training (CT)—really all it's cracked up to be? Is it safe for kids? Is it worth the money? Naomi Steiner, M.D., shares the research behind some computer-based alternative therapies so you can make an informed decision before treating your child.

Healing the ADHD Brain: Interventions and Strategies that Work

>> <http://additu.de/healing>

There's no one-size-fits-all approach for treating ADHD. Here, Daniel G. Amen, M.D., explains treatment options ranging from medication and supplements to diet and exercise.

The Truth About Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

>> <http://additu.de/17->

There are lots of misconceptions surrounding OCD and ADHD, especially when the conditions coexist. In this webinar, host Roberto Olivardia, Ph.D., sets the record straight about this potentially debilitating condition. Learn the truth about obsessive-compulsive disorder, so you (or your child) can get the right diagnosis and receive the proper treatment.

7 Fixes for Self-Defeating ADHD Behaviors

>> <http://additu.de/brown>

Are your bad habits setting you up for failure? Find out what behaviors to watch for, and seven simple changes that can help you reach your full potential and put you on the path to success. Entrepreneur and ADHD coach Alan Brown teaches “fix-it” strategies that he used to cope with his own ADHD.

Mastering ADHD Medications

>> <http://additu.de/22>

Dr. William Dodson, a board-certified adult psychiatrist who specializes in treating ADHD, discusses the many medication options for ADHD and how each one works. Learn about choosing a medication, minimizing side effects, and finding the right dosage for yourself or your child.

FREE ADHD Newsletters from ADDitude

Sign up to receive critical news and information about ADHD diagnosis and treatment, plus strategies for school, parenting, and living better with ADHD:
<http://additu.de/email>

Adult ADHD and LD (weekly)

Expert advice on managing your household, time, money, career, and relationships

Parenting ADHD and LD Children (weekly)

Strategies and support for parents on behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, and making friends.

ADHD and LD at School (bimonthly; weekly from August through October)

How to get classroom accommodations, finish homework, work with teachers, find the right schools, and much more.

Treating ADHD (weekly)

Treatment options for attention deficit including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies.