

ADHD: What Teens Need to Know

What does ADHD stand for?

ADHD = Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a complicated disorder which affects how some parts of the brain develop, and impacts its ability to regulate (or control) behaviour, thinking, and/or emotions.



How many people have ADHD?

Approximately 5% of young people around the world have ADHD.

Having ADHD is Just One Aspect of Who Someone Is

Every person has unique interests, talents, and personality.

There are many successful people with ADHD. In fact, many well-known actors, athletes, musicians, journalists, and scientists have ADHD diagnoses.

There is also some research evidence suggesting that individuals with ADHD may be more likely to "think outside the box" than other people.

It is important for people with ADHD to understand how it impacts them and find ways to address their symptoms; however, it is also important for them to remember their personal strengths and recognize that they can work to adjust their environment so they can thrive.



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Types of ADHD

Hyperactive-Impulsive

These individuals are easier to spot because they are often moving or fidgeting and find it difficult to stay seated. They may also be very talkative and have a tendency to interrupt others.



Inattentive

It may seem like these individuals do not hear instructions, and have difficulty staying focused on some tasks, tend to lose things, and have struggles staying organized.



Combined

These individuals have both the "Inattentive" and the "Hyperactive-Impulsive" characteristics.

When we look at brain images, we can see differences between people with ADHD and people without ADHD.



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How Can ADHD Impact Teens?

☐ Being "Time Blind"

- struggles estimating time, being late, or missing deadlines

☐ Missing Instructions

- not hearing or remembering what they have been told

☐ Being Inconsistent

- their ability to complete tasks effectively changes from day to day, and even from time to time, depending on what is happening in the environment or how fatigued their brain is

☐ Controlling Attention

- struggles to stay focused on an uninteresting task, or stop a task that is really interesting or rewarding (like video games or TikTok!)

☐ Being Impulsive

- struggles with impulsive decisions - these can put young people with ADHD at greater risk for many issues (such as substance use/abuse, unplanned pregnancies, and car accidents); however, this just means an increased chance of problems - they are NOT inevitable

☐ Experiencing Worry & Sadness

- they may experience increased levels of worry and sadness; these concerns may be particularly likely if their ADHD is not treated properly

Many people have some of these symptoms some of the time.
People with ADHD have many of these symptoms much of the time
at home, in school, and in other activities.

Three Main Ways of Treating ADHD

Learn About ADHD

+

Use Strategies and Supports

+

Medication



Treating ADHD: Part One

Learn About ADHD

When someone with ADHD learns more about it, they are less likely to feel bad about themselves. The more they understand their struggles, the more likely they are to use strategies and be successful.

Also - when they understand the disorder, a young person is more likely to advocate for themselves with teachers, employers, and parents (e.g., request accommodations or get permission to use strategies).

Treating ADHD: Part Two

Use Strategies and Supports

There are many things teens can do to manage their ADHD symptoms. Ensuring that they get regular exercise, sufficient sleep, and eat a balanced diet are important lifestyle measures to set themselves up for success.

Teens also need to experiment with different strategies, such as:

- create a visual schedule as a reminder of expectations
- use checklists to remember daily goals - have sticky notes available!
- reduce distractions around them (e.g., wear headphones while working)
- chunk large projects into smaller parts
- use a day-planner to write down due dates, as well as earlier deadlines for smaller parts of big projects
- use phone alarms or countdown apps to set time limits while working and to make sure there is plenty of time for transitions
- check with others to ensure understanding of expectations
- re-charge the brain when it has been working hard, with movement and exercise, healthy snacks and drinks, and time with friends and family
- advocate with teachers for personal needs (e.g., extra time for exams)

Another helpful resource might be talk therapy. Counselling can help teens learn strategies to deal with their ADHD symptoms, as well as address other concerns that may develop, such as excessive feelings of worry, sadness, or thoughts of self-harm.



Treating ADHD: Part Three

Medication

The majority of teens with ADHD do benefit from medication and although medication does not "cure" ADHD, it does help the individual:

- concentrate on difficult tasks
- be more receptive to new information
- be more able to develop new skills and strategies to meet their goals
- decrease risks (e.g., underachievement, substance abuse, depression)

ADHD medication helps optimize communication in the brain.

There are two main categories of medications for ADHD:
stimulants and non-stimulants.



Stimulants:

Have been prescribed for over 50 years and many many studies have been conducted which demonstrate their effectiveness and safety in treating ADHD symptoms. Stimulants can have side effects such as poor appetite during the day, but the side effects can get better over time.

Non-Stimulants:

These can take longer to be effective; however, they may be a better choice for those people who have too many side effects from stimulant medication

Did You Know?

The term "Attention Deficit" is misleading because people with ADHD can sometimes concentrate really well especially on things that they find interesting (such as video games or hobbies they are passionate about). Their ability to do so can be confusing and it can seem like an excuse to focus on the things they enjoy - however it is because some activities are much more rewarding to their brain.



ADHD has nothing to do with how intelligent someone is, but it can make school and learning more challenging!

ADHD can lead to people seeming "consistently inconsistent", as their ability to focus, complete, and transition between tasks may vary from day-to-day.

Most people with ADHD continue to have the disorder into adulthood; however, with support they are often able to gain self-awareness, develop strategies, and seek out situations in which they can become very effective at managing their symptoms.

Both males and females can have ADHD; however, females may be less likely to get diagnosed when they are young.



ADHD is a highly genetic disorder which often runs in families.



Symptoms such as hyperactivity may decrease in the teenage years; however, struggles with attention may become more problematic with the increasing demands of school work and employment.



ADHD Can Impact How Teens Feel About Themselves

ADHD can make it more difficult for teens to do what is expected of them at home, in school, and in the community.

If others do not have a good understanding of ADHD, they can assume that the teen is "lazy", not trying, or even making mistakes on purpose. This can be particularly frustrating because teens with ADHD often have to work even harder than their peers.

When teens struggle to do things, or often get in trouble, they can start to feel bad about themselves and their abilities. Friendships may also be more difficult to maintain with ADHD. Proper diagnosis and treatment of ADHD are important ways to decrease these risks.

For More Information:

Foothills Academy (ADHD services and support for youth and families):
FoothillsAcademy.org

Understood (ADHD resources and community):
Understood.org

CADDAC (Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada):
CADDAC.ca

