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What is ADHD? Diagnosis & Treatment

Many of us occasionally experience problems stemming from a lack of focus, impulsivity, and/or restlessness. For some people, though, these symptoms can occur multiple times each day and interfere with activities of daily living. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (also known as ADHD) is a neurological condition characterized by difficulty focusing, impulsive behaviors, hyperactivity, and restlessness. In adults, ADHD may also manifest as memory or attention troubles. Any of these symptoms can cause issues at work and in personal life.

NOT ABOUT INTELLIGENCE OR WILLPOWER

ADHD is not associated with a person's level of intelligence. People with ADHD simply have different brain wiring systems. For someone with ADHD, it is difficult to stay task-focused if they do not find the task at hand to be interesting or challenging. Ordinary distractions can easily interrupt the flow of productivity and make task switching or returning to a task difficult.

ADHD is also unrelated to willpower. The inability to focus, impulsive behaviors, and restlessness associated with the condition are not voluntary. Individuals with ADHD do not consciously choose to exhibit disruptive behaviors, interrupt conversations, or act restless. Rather, these behaviors result from unique wiring in the brain.

UNIQUE WIRING

The brain of a person with ADHD is like a fighter jet with a sensitive guidance system. No matter how hard the pilot tries to steer the fighter jet in the right direction, the guidance system does not respond in the same way that other jets might. Distractions overwhelm the typical functioning of the ADHD fighter jet. The communications system picks up multiple stations and conversations at once, making it difficult to sort through incoming messages. The ADHD fighter jet's brakes are loose, allowing the pilot's thoughts to be whisked miles away and making course correction difficult.

IDENTIFYING & DIAGNOSING ADHD

ADHD does not appear spontaneously. A person's medical record may include an ADHD diagnosis during childhood, but not every child with ADHD is diagnosed accurately, if at all. ADHD in adults tends to result in work struggles such as difficulty following directions, missed deadlines, or poor attention to detail. Relationships can also suffer as a result of ADHD. Forgetting to complete daily tasks, missed appointments, and falling through on promises can lead to partners feeling burdened. Disorganization associated with ADHD can cause additional problems at work and home that in turn may cause financial difficulties.

There are some common signs that a person may have ADHD. Someone could be cooking a meal but have to return to the grocery store 3 times during the cooking process to pick up forgotten ingredients. Someone else could have 10 things on their to-do list at work and instead of finishing one, they start a new one because it is more enticing. Another person might lose everyday items all the time, and yet another might consistently avoid tasks that are difficult or require sustained effort.

Jason Meisel, a psychiatric nurse practitioner at Ahead, says that to [receive an ADHD diagnosis](#), “multiple symptoms must be present. These symptoms must occur in more than one aspect of life and interfere with everyday development and/or functioning.”

ADHD CAN BE A STRENGTH

Despite the challenges it presents, ADHD can be a strength. People with ADHD are often spontaneous and creative and have many unique ideas. Instead of fighting the traits associated with ADHD, view them as strengths and talents that can be applied in everyday situations. Having access to the right resources can help.

ADHD TREATMENT

Fortunately, ADHD is treatable. ADHD treatment can vary a lot from person to person. Research shows that psychotherapy, or “talk therapy,” and stimulant medications are most likely to have the best results.

A psychotherapy provider will help you better understand your thoughts, behaviors, and responses to certain medications. During psychotherapy sessions, you work with your provider to design a plan to help you improve your everyday life. This plan usually involves a combination of therapy and medication. Other options like organizational training or cognitive behavioral therapy can also be used to address specific concerns.

If you suspect that you may have ADHD, or all signs in your life point to it, the best thing to do is to speak with a board-certified practitioner who is trained in diagnosing and treating ADHD. These specialists are uniquely qualified to explore different management options and discern the proper course of treatment.