

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)

KEY MESSAGES

- ADHD involves a range of challenges with attention, planning, impulsivity, and hyperactivity.
- People living with ADHD can benefit from support such as connecting with peers, lifestyle changes and routine building, therapeutic support, and medication.
- It is possible to live a full and meaningful life even if a person has experienced ADHD.

WHAT IS ATTENTION-DEFICIT HYPERACTIVE DISORDER (ADHD)?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition which affects both children and adults. ADHD is a form of neurodivergence, meaning that people living with ADHD think, learn, experience, and interact with the world around them in a different way to other people.

More and more people are recognising ADHD and how it impacts on people through the lifespan. It involves different combinations of challenges with attention, planning, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. ADHD can also involve many strengths: for example, many people living with ADHD are creative, think outside the box, and are able to focus on certain tasks for long periods of time.

SYMPTOMS OF ADHD

To be diagnosed with ADHD, a person must experience either difficulties with attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity, or both. These symptoms must first be present before the age of 12 years, occur in multiple settings, and impact on day-to-day life ⁽¹⁾.

Attention problems

This can include difficulties with:

- Paying attention for long periods of time to tasks that require mental effort
- Becoming easily distracted
- Detail in schoolwork, work, or other activities

- Organisation, planning, and time management
- Forgetfulness

Hyperactivity and impulsivity

This can include difficulties with:

- Fidgeting, squirming, or restlessness
- Playing or taking part in leisure activities quietly
- Interrupting or intruding on others
- Talking excessively
- Waiting their turn.

Many people living with ADHD also experience other neurodevelopmental or mental health conditions. These may co-occur because of similar genetic factors or experiences associated with both conditions, or overlap in symptoms. They can also co-occur because the impact of living with ADHD can increase the likelihood of developing other conditions.

Common co-occurring conditions include ^(2,3):

- Depression
- Bipolar disorder
- Anxiety disorders
- Substance use problems
- Autism

WHAT CAUSES ADHD?

People living with ADHD have different brain chemistry which affects certain areas of the brain. This results in challenges relating to something called **executive functioning**: a set of mental processes involving planning, organising, regulating attention, memory, managing impulses, and decision-making ⁽⁴⁾.

There is no single cause of ADHD. It's known to run in families and there is a strong genetic basis. Environmental factors, including stressful life experiences, can increase the likelihood of someone developing ADHD ⁽⁵⁾.

HOW COMMON IS ADHD?

It's estimated that around 8% of Australian children experience ADHD ⁽⁶⁾.

Many children continue to experience ADHD into adulthood. It's estimated that between 2-5% of adults experience ADHD ⁽⁷⁾. More and more people are becoming aware of ADHD, including adults seeking assessment and diagnosis for the first time.

ADHD is diagnosed more often in boys and men, compared to girls and women. Signs of ADHD are not always recognised in girls. Boys tend to display more hyperactive symptoms which are often easier for adults recognise ⁽⁸⁾.

MANAGING SYMPTOMS OF ADHD

Over time, people living with ADHD may find the following activities and strategies helpful to achieve their goals, help with day-to-day life, and prevent burnout ⁽⁹⁾:

- Trialling different organisation and time management strategies that might help – for example, using calendar and to-do list/reminder apps, visual reminders like whiteboards or sticky notes, or breaking down tasks into small goals.
- Building routines.
- Engaging in creative and stimulating activities.
- Developing routines to help look after physical health by getting a balanced diet, regular exercise, and enough sleep.

Connecting with others with similar experiences, such as through peer support.

SUPPORT FOR ADHD

Professional information and support is available to help people who have ADHD. It's a good idea to first speak with a GP about any concerns, who can refer onwards for specialist support. Both psychologists and psychiatrists can assess and diagnose ADHD in children and adults.

ADHD is often a long-term condition. People can benefit from getting support to help them understand ADHD, manage its symptoms through various strategies, and work towards their individual goals. An important goal can be working towards self-acceptance, rather than trying to fit in with others' expectations.

Support options include counselling or psychological support such as cognitive behavioural therapy, coaching, and peer support. Medications are available as an option to help manage ADHD symptoms ⁽⁹⁾.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

- [Australian ADHD Guidelines](#)
- [ADHD Australia](#)
- [How to ADHD](#) (YouTube channel)
- [ADHD Language Guide](#)

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