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WHAT IS ADHD?

Everyone has trouble paying attention from time to time, especially during activities that are boring or not enjoyable. But for children and youth with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), inattention and distractibility are so severe that youth can have problems with school, work and relationships.

ADHD is one of the most common **neurodevelopment disorders** of childhood. It is usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood. Children with ADHD may have trouble paying attention, controlling impulsive behaviours (may act without thinking about what the result will be), or be overly active.

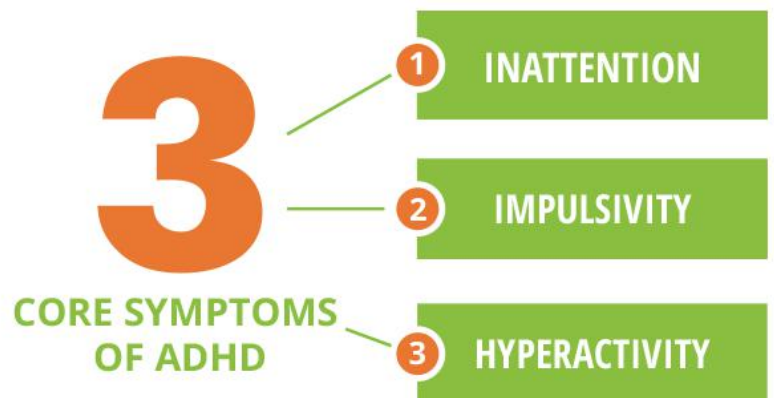


Image from www.vyvanse.com

ADHD - THE BASICS

- ▶ There are 3 main types of ADHD: predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive/impulsive, and combined type.
- ▶ Any child can have moments of being inattentive, impulsive, or hyperactive. Children with ADHD, however, experience these symptoms repeatedly and in a way that is severe enough to have an impact at home, at school, or in social situations. In addition, these behaviours may not seem appropriate for the child's age.
- ▶ Symptoms must be present for at least **6 months** in two or more settings (e.g., home, school, with friends), and clearly interfere with social or academic functioning. In addition, symptoms must also have been present before the age of 12 and not be better explained by another mental disorder.
- ▶ Only a trained health care professional can accurately diagnose ADHD.

SYMPTOMS OF ADHD IN CHILDREN

There are three core symptoms of ADHD: inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. Below is a breakdown of ADHD symptoms. This list is an overview of what these symptoms may look like in children. It is not a diagnostic tool.

SYMPTOMS OF INATTENTION

- Often makes careless mistakes and lacks attention to details:** Overlooking or missing details or handing in work that's inaccurate
- Often has difficulty paying attention to tasks or while playing:** Difficulty remaining focused during class, conversations, or lengthy readings
- Often seems to not listen when spoken to directly:** Mind seems elsewhere, even in the absence of obvious distraction
- Often fails to follow through on instructions, schoolwork, or chores:** Starts tasks but quickly loses focus and is easily sidetracked
- Often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities:** Messy, disorganized work; poor time management
- Often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to participate in tasks requiring sustained mental effort, like schoolwork or homework**
- Often loses things like school materials or, if older, wallets, keys, eyeglasses, and mobile phones**
- Often easily distracted**
- Often forgetful in daily activities such as chores**

SYMPTOMS OF HYPERACTIVITY & IMPULSIVITY

- Often fidgets with or taps hands and feet or squirms in seat**
- Often leaves seat when remaining seated is expected.** Leaves their place in the classroom or in other situations that require remaining seated
- Often runs or climbs where it is inappropriate or feels restless**
- Often unable to play quietly or, if older, struggles to participate in leisurely activities**
- Often acts as if "on the go" or "driven by a motor":** Is unable or uncomfortable being still for an extended time, as in restaurants
- Often talks excessively**
- Often blurts out an answer before a question has been fully asked:** Completes people's sentences, cannot wait for next turn in conversation
- Often has difficulty waiting his or her turn, such as while waiting in line**
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others:** Butts into conversations, games, or activities; may start using other people's things without asking or receiving permission

THREE SUBTYPES

The three different types of ADHD depend on which types of symptoms are strongest in the individual: (1) Predominantly Inattentive Presentation; (2) Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation; and (3) Combined Presentation.

HOW SYMPTOMS MAY APPEAR IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS

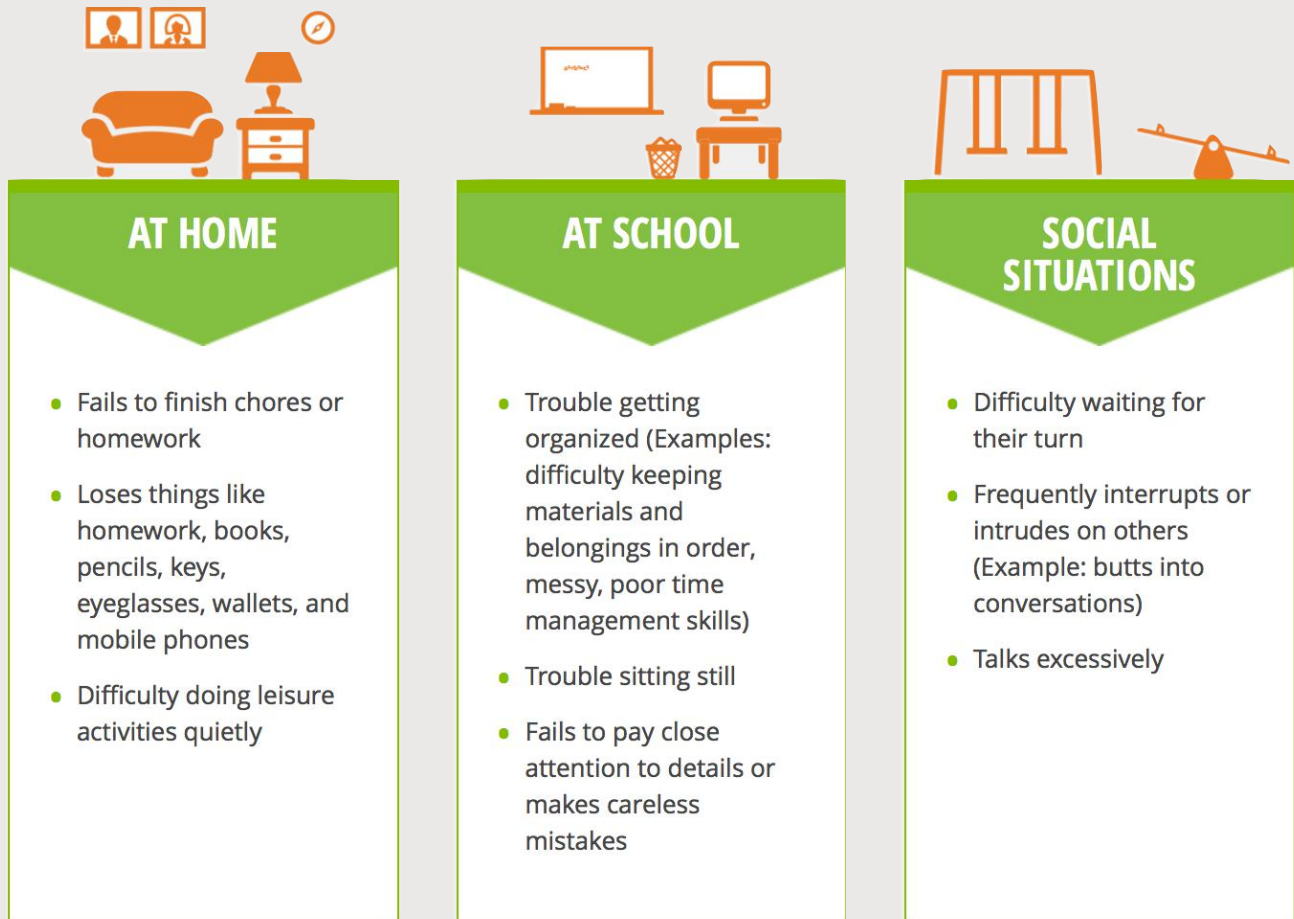


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ADHD ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

CHILDREN (6 TO 12)

Inattention: Kids may make careless mistakes in schoolwork, have difficulty remaining focused in class, and seem not to listen when spoken to directly.

Hyperactivity & Impulsivity: Kids may often fidget or squirm, have trouble staying seated, have difficulty playing or working quietly, or blurt out answers in school.

TEENS (13 TO 17)

Inattention: Teens may avoid homework and may spend a lot of time doing tasks that require little mental effort, such as watching TV, gaming, or appearing “lazy”.

Hyperactivity & Impulsivity: Teens may feel restless, have difficulty waiting their turn, use other people’s things without asking, and intrude or take over what others are doing.

ADULTS

Inattention: Adults may forget to keep appointments, pay bills, or return calls and avoid completing forms or reviewing paperwork.

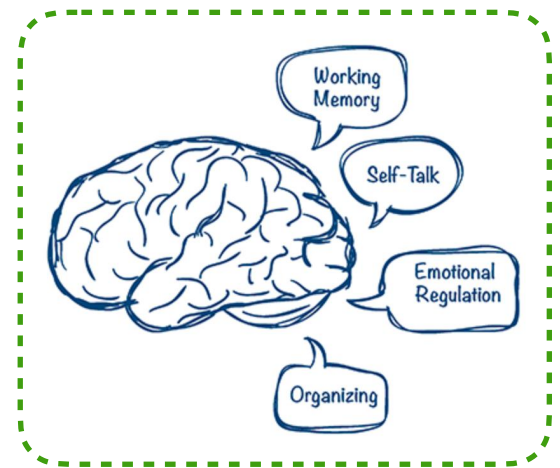
Hyperactivity & Impulsivity: Adults may feel restless, be uncomfortable being still, and frequently interrupt conversations or complete people’s sentences.

WHAT CAUSES ADHD?

ADHD is caused by a weakness in executive function. Executive function refers to brain functions that activate, organize, integrate and manage other functions. It allows children to account for short- and long-term consequences of their actions and to plan for those results.

Here is an example of how the executive function process works, broken down into six steps:

1. **Analyze a task. Figure out what needs to be done.**
2. **Plan how to handle the task.**
3. **Get organized. Break down the plan into a series of steps.**
4. **Figure out how much time is needed to carry out the plan, and set aside the time.**
5. **Make adjustments as needed**
6. **Finish the task in the time allotted.**



If executive functioning is working well and the task is fairly simple, the brain may go through these steps in a matter of seconds. If your child has weak executive skills, though, performing even a simple task can be challenging.

WHAT SKILLS ARE AFFECTED BY EXECUTIVE FUNCTION ISSUES?

- **Impulse control:** This is your child's ability to stop and think before acting. Impulsivity can be a symptom of ADHD. Kids who have trouble with impulse control may blurt things out. They may do unsafe things without thinking it through. They're likely to rush through homework without checking it. They also may quit a chore halfway through to go hang out with friends and have trouble following rules consistently.
- **Emotional control:** This is your child's ability to manage her feelings by focusing on the end result or goal. Emotional control and impulse control are closely related. Kids who struggle with emotional control often have trouble accepting negative feedback. They also may overreact to little injustices. They may struggle to finish a task when something upsets them.
- **Flexibility:** This is your child's ability to roll with the punches and come up with new approaches when a plan fails. Kids who are inflexible think in very concrete ways. They don't see other options or solutions. They find it difficult to change course. They may get panicky and frustrated when they're asked to do so.
- **Working memory:** This is your child's ability to hold information in his mind and use it to complete a task. Kids who have weak working memory skills have trouble with multi-step tasks. They have a hard time remembering directions, taking notes or understanding something you've just explained to them. If your child has trouble with working memory, you frequently may hear, "I forgot what I was going to say."
- **Self-monitoring:** This is your child's ability to keep track of and evaluate her performance on regular tasks. Kids who have trouble self-monitoring lack self-awareness. They can't tell if their strategies are working. They may not even realize they have strategies. They often don't know how to check their work.
- **Planning and prioritizing:** This is your child's ability to come up with the steps needed to reach a goal and to decide their order of importance. Kids with weak planning and prioritizing skills may not know how to start planning a project. They may be easily overwhelmed trying to break tasks into smaller, more manageable chunks. They may have trouble seeing the main idea.
- **Task initiation:** This is your child's ability to get started on something. Kids who struggle with this skill often have issues with planning and prioritizing too. Without having a plan for a task, it's hard to know how to start. Kids with task initiation problems can come across as lazy or as simply procrastinating. But often they're just so overwhelmed they freeze and do nothing.
- **Organization:** This is your child's ability to keep track of information and things. Kids with organizational issues are constantly losing or misplacing things. They can't find a way to get organized even when there are negative consequences to being disorganized.

HOW IS ADHD DIAGNOSED?

Given that ADHD is a complex neurodevelopmental condition, it requires a comprehensive assessment

Step 1: Complete a symptom checklist. You may wish to complete a symptom checklist, like the one provided below from www.vyvanse.com. Also, talk to your child's teacher or daycare worker to verify that symptoms are occurring in more than one context.

Step 2: Visit your family doctor. You and your child's doctor will talk about what you're seeing. The doctor will let you know if the behaviours are out of the ordinary and warrant further investigation. He will also want to rule out medical causes. These could include seizure disorders, hearing impairments and autism. Some of this can be done in the office. But the doctor may send you to a specialist such as an audiologist or pediatrician.

Step 3: See a clinical psychologist. Once your child's doctor has ruled out medical causes, you'll likely be referred to a clinical psychologist. Dr. Kate Aubrey is a clinical psychologist who routinely conducts ADHD assessments. Dr. Aubrey will gather information from your child's medical and school records. She'll talk to you and other people who know your child well. You'll likely discuss having your child evaluated further. The evaluation process may include:

- * **Questionnaires or screening forms.** You, your child, and your child's teacher will be asked to fill out questionnaires about your child's skills. Dr. Aubrey uses the Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF).
- * **Intelligence testing.** Your child will complete an intelligence (IQ) test. This test provides a better picture of your child's true potential. They might show, for example, that your child has excellent verbal comprehension but has difficulty recalling information or processing it quickly.
- * **Academic testing.** Your child may also complete academic testing to determine if there are any learning disabilities.
- * **A child observation and interview.** Most professionals will also want to see for themselves the way your child interacts with people and the world around her. Dr. Aubrey will make behavioural observations during the assessment process and during an interview with your child.

Step 4: Put it all together. After collecting all the information, Dr. Aubrey will write a report and go over the assessment results with you. Dr. Aubrey may not be able to give your child a formal diagnosis but she can provide more information about the specific areas in which your child is struggling. She will also suggest strategies to try at home and ways your child's school can help.

TREATMENT FOR ADHD

For many people, ADHD **medication** reduces hyperactivity and impulsivity and improve their ability to focus, work, and learn. Anyone taking medications must be monitored closely and carefully by their prescribing doctor.

Behavioural therapy is a type of psychotherapy that aims to help a person change his behaviour. It might involve practical assistance, such as help organizing tasks or completing schoolwork, or working through emotionally difficult events.

Parenting skills training teaches parents the skills they need to encourage and reward positive behaviours in their children. It helps parents learn how to use a system of rewards and consequences to change a child's behaviour. They may also learn to structure situations in ways that support desired behaviour.

ADHD Symptom Checklist

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurobehavioral disorder that appears as a pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity/impulsivity that may interfere with your child’s daily life and is inconsistent with his or her age. This checklist is a tool to let the doctor know what ADHD symptoms your child may be experiencing, the frequency in which he/she experiences them, and in what settings (at home, at school, in social situations) they occur.

It may be helpful to:

- Record your own observations
- Ask for input from teachers and family members who know your child well
- Have your child complete a checklist and then compare notes

Checklist key:

Home = Work or School = Social =

You can use the ADHD Symptom Checklist at your child’s first visit with the doctor, and during follow-up visits to help the doctor understand how your child is doing while on treatment.




Please note, this checklist is not a diagnostic tool. Only a doctor or other trained health care professional can diagnose ADHD.

Mark each section with: Never = **N** Sometimes = **S** Often = **O**

Symptoms of inattention in the past 6 months:				
1	Careless mistakes/lack of attention to details <i>Examples: overlooks or misses details; work is inaccurate</i>			
2	Has difficulty paying attention <i>Example: has difficulty remaining focused during class, conversations, or lengthy readings</i>			
3	Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly <i>Example: mind seems elsewhere, even in the absence of obvious distraction</i>			
4	Fails to follow through on instructions, schoolwork, or chores <i>Example: starts tasks but quickly loses focus and is easily sidetracked</i>			
5	Has difficulty organizing tasks and activities <i>Examples: messy, disorganized work; poor time management</i>			
6	Avoids tasks requiring sustained mental effort <i>Examples: schoolwork or homework</i>			
7	Loses things <i>Examples: school materials, pencils, or books</i>			
8	Easily distracted			
9	Forgetful in daily activities <i>Example: chores</i>			

ADHD Symptom Checklist, continued

Mark each section with: Never = **N** Sometimes = **S** Often = **O**

Symptoms of hyperactivity/impulsivity in the past 6 months:				
1	Fidgets with or taps hands or feet or squirms in seat			
2	Leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected <i>Example: leaves seat in the classroom or other situations that require remaining seated</i>			
3	Runs or climbs in situations where it is inappropriate			
4	Unable to play quietly			
5	"On the go," acts as if "driven by a motor" <i>Examples: unable to stay still, may be experienced by others as hard to keep up with</i>			
6	Talks excessively			
7	Blurts out answers before questions have been asked <i>Examples: completes people's sentences; can't wait for turn in conversation</i>			
8	Has difficulty waiting his/her turn <i>Example: while waiting in line</i>			
9	Interrupts or intrudes on others <i>Examples: butts into conversations, games, or activities; uses other people's things without asking or receiving permission</i>			