

Attention-Deficit /Hyperactivity Disorder —What is ADHD?



What is Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

- ADHD is one of the most common neurobehavioral disorders of childhood and can persist through adolescence and into adulthood. Currently the causes are unknown.

A person with ADHD has a chronic level of inattention, impulsivity/hyperactivity, or both such that daily functioning is compromised. The [symptoms](#) of the disorder must be present at levels that are higher than expected for a person's developmental stage and must interfere with the person's ability to function in different settings (e.g., in school and at home). A person with ADHD may struggle in important areas of life, such as peer and family relationships, and school or work performance.



The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV (DSM-IV-TR, 2000) estimates that 3%-7% of children suffer from ADHD. Some studies have estimated higher rates in community samples. ADHD is diagnosed approximately three times more often in boys than in girls.

- Three types of ADHD have been established according to which [symptoms](#) are most noticeable in the individual. These types are described below:
 - 1) ***Predominantly Inattentive Type***: It may be hard for the individual to organize or finish a task, to pay attention to details, or to follow instructions or conversations. Focusing in the classroom may be very difficult. The person can be easily distracted or forget details of daily routines.
 - 2) ***Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type***: The person may fidget and talk a lot. It may be hard to sit still for long (e.g., for a meal or while doing homework). Smaller children may run, jump or climb constantly. The individual may often feel restless or have trouble with impulsivity. Someone who is impulsive may interrupt others a lot, grab things from people, or speak at inappropriate times. It may be hard for the person to wait their turn or listen to directions. A person with impulsiveness may have more accidents and injuries than others.
 - 3) ***Combined Type***: [Symptoms](#) of the above two types are equally predominant in the person.
- As many as half of those with ADHD also have other mental disorders. These comorbidities of ADHD (other disorders that occur along with ADHD) can make it harder to diagnose and treat ADHD. They may also present further challenges to the individual with ADHD.
- The DSM-IV-TR provides criteria for diagnosing ADHD. This diagnostic standard helps ensure that people are appropriately diagnosed and treated for ADHD. Using the same standard across communities will help determine the public health impact of ADHD.

Treatment for ADHD may be through medical or behavioral therapies, or a combination of the two.