

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Saina Pakwal *

Department of Neuroscience, University of Health and Medicine, India

Signs and Symptoms

It is normal for children to have trouble focusing and behaving at one time or another. However, children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) do not just grow out of these behaviors. The symptoms continue, can be severe, and can cause difficulty at school, at home, or with friends.

A child with ADHD might:

- Daydream a lot
- Forget or lose things a lot
- Squirm or fidget
- Talk too much
- Make careless mistakes or take unnecessary risks
- Have a hard time resisting temptation
- Have trouble taking turns
- Have difficulty getting along with others

Types

There are three different types of ADHD, depending on which types of symptoms are strongest in the individual:

Predominantly Inattentive Presentation: It is hard for the individual to organize or finish a task, to pay attention to details, or to follow instructions or conversations. The person is easily distracted or forgets details of daily routines.

Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation: The person fidgets and talks a lot. It is 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 feels restless and has trouble with impulsivity. Someone who is impulsive may interrupt others a lot, grab things from people, or speak at inappropriate times. It is hard for the person to wait their turn or listen to directions. A person with impulsiveness may have more accidents and injuries than others.

Combined Presentation: Symptoms of the above two types are equally present in the person.

Because symptoms can change over time, the presentation may change over time as well.

Causes of ADHD

Scientists are studying cause(s) and risk factors in an effort to find better ways to manage and reduce the chances of a person having ADHD. The cause(s) and risk factors for ADHD are unknown, but current research shows that genetics plays an important role. Recent studies of twins link genes with ADHD.

In addition to genetics, scientists are studying other possible causes and risk factors including:

- Brain injury
- Exposure to environmental (e.g., lead) during pregnancy or at a young age
- Alcohol and tobacco use during pregnancy
- Premature delivery
- Low birth weight

Research does not support the popularly held views that ADHD is caused by eating too much sugar, watching too much television, parenting, or social and environmental factors such as poverty or family chaos. Of course, many things, including these, might make symptoms worse, especially in certain people. But the evidence is not strong enough to conclude that they are the main causes of ADHD.

Diagnosis

Deciding if a child has ADHD is a process with several steps. There is no single test to diagnose ADHD, and many other problems, like anxiety, depression, sleep problems, and certain types of learning disabilities, can have similar symptoms. One step of the process involves having a medical exam, including hearing and vision tests, to rule out other problems with symptoms like ADHD. Diagnosing ADHD usually includes a checklist for rating ADHD symptoms and taking a history of the child from parents, teachers, and sometimes, the child.

*Corresponding author: Saina Pakwal, Department of Neuroscience, University of Health and Medicine, India. E-mail: saina.pakwal@gmail.com

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