



WITHOUT BOUNDARIES
CHALLENGES AND HOPES FOR LIVING WITH ADHD:
AN INTERNATIONAL SURVEY



Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Background Information

What is ADHD?

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, is a biological, brain-based condition thought to be caused by an imbalance of some of the brain's neurotransmitters, which are the substances used to signal between nerve cells.¹
- ADHD is one of the most common disorders of childhood and adolescence.²
- The condition is characterized by hyperactive or impulsive behaviors and attention-deficit problems that cannot be explained by any other psychiatric condition and are not in keeping with the child's intellectual ability or stage of development.²

Who has ADHD?

- ADHD is thought to affect 3-7 percent of school-aged children.³
- Evidence suggests that boys are three times more likely to have ADHD than girls,¹ although the higher rate may be due to the greater prevalence of behavioral and conduct problems in boys, leading to a higher referral rate.⁴
- ADHD is a strongly inheritable condition. If a family has one child with ADHD there is a 30-40 percent chance that a brother or sister will also have the condition.¹ More than half of all parents with ADHD themselves will have a child with ADHD.⁵
- Experts estimate that up to 60 percent of children with the disorder carry their symptoms into adulthood.⁶

What are the symptoms of ADHD?

- ADHD is a dimensional disorder – that is, it can be exhibited in mild, moderate and severe forms.¹
- The symptoms of ADHD include hyperactive or impulsive behaviors and deficits in attention. Most people with ADHD have a mixture of these symptoms ('combined type') but others may have mainly one type of

symptoms ('predominantly impulsive type' or 'predominantly inattentive type').⁶

- To meet standard diagnostic criteria, some symptoms of ADHD must appear before the age of seven, cause impairment, and persist for at least six months to a degree that is unusual for the person's age. The symptoms must cause impairment in two or more settings, e.g. at home and at school.⁶

Symptoms of inattention

- Failure to give close attention to detail
- Difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play
- Not appearing to listen when spoken to directly
- Not following through on instructions
- Difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- Avoiding or disliking tasks that require sustained mental effort
- Often losing necessary things
- Easily distracted
- Forgetful in daily activities

Symptoms of hyperactivity

- Fidgeting often with hands or feet
- Often leaves seat in situations where remaining seated is expected
- Runs about inappropriately
- Difficulty playing quietly
- Excessive talk
- Often on the go

Symptoms of impulsivity

- Blurting out answers before questions are complete
- Difficulty awaiting turn
- Often interrupting or intruding on others⁶

What are the causes of ADHD?

- The precise cause of ADHD remains undetermined. A large body of medical research, however, points to a biological cause and a genetic link.
- Social factors, such as bad parenting, diet or lifestyle do not cause ADHD, although they can make the symptoms worse.¹

How is ADHD diagnosed and treated?

- Like many disorders, ADHD is a clinical diagnosis based on a review of the patient's history and the observations of others. There is no single blood analysis or similar physical tests that can be used to diagnose the condition.
- Instead, physicians evaluate their patients based on the person's overall patterns of behavior and the symptoms of the disorder, using the diagnostic criteria DSM-IV.⁶
- Only specially-trained healthcare professionals can officially diagnose ADHD.

- Healthcare professionals secure information regarding behavior in all facets of the person's life directly from the family and, when appropriate, their teachers (using standard rating scales).
- Physicians must also evaluate individuals for other possible causes of inattentive or overactive behavior, as well as for common coexisting conditions, including depression and anxiety.⁶
- Most experts agree that an appropriate treatment strategy should include a combination of medical, educational and behavioral approaches.¹

What are the potential long-term effects of ADHD?

- ADHD may have serious consequences if undiagnosed, including under-performance at school or work, depression, problems with relationships, as well as with finding and keeping employment.¹

¹ Green C, Chee K. Understanding ADHD – A Parent's Guide to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in Children. Vermillion Publishing 1997

² Practice Parameter for the Assessment and Treatment of Children, Adolescents and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psych* 36:10 85S-119S

³ American Academy of Pediatrics. Clinical practice guidelines: diagnosis and evaluation of the child with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Pediatrics* 2000; 105:1158-1170

⁴ Fredman SJ, Korn ML. ADHD and Comorbidity. 154th Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, May 2001

⁵ Weiss M et al. ADHD in Parents. *Ch & Adolesc Psych* 2000; 39:1059-1061

⁶ American Psychiatric Association. DSM-IV Text Revision. 2000: 85-93