

Laurel Ridge Treatment Center

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Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder

What is attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder?

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is an illness characterized by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. The most commonly diagnosed behavior disorder in young persons, ADHD affects an estimated three percent to five percent of school-age children.

Although ADHD is usually diagnosed in childhood, it is not a disorder limited to children. ADHD often persists into adolescence and adulthood and is frequently not diagnosed until later years.

What are the symptoms of ADHD?

There are three different types of ADHD, each with varying symptoms: predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive/impulsive, and combined.

Those with the predominantly inattentive type often:

- Fail to pay close attention to details or make careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other activities
- Have difficulty sustaining attention to tasks or leisure activities
- Do not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- Do not follow through on instructions and fail to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace
- Have difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- Avoid, dislike, or are reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort
- Lose things necessary for tasks or activities
- Are easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
- Are forgetful in daily activities

Those with the predominantly hyperactive/impulsive type often:

- Fidget with their hands or feet or squirm in their seat
- Leave their seat in situations in which remaining seated is expected
- Move excessively or feel restless during situations in which such behavior is inappropriate
- Have difficulty engaging in leisure activities quietly
- Are "on the go" or act as if "driven by a motor"
- Talk excessively
- Blurt out answers before questions have been completed
- Have difficulty awaiting their turn
- Interrupt or intrude on others

Those with the combined type, the most common type of ADHD, have a combination of the inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive symptoms.

What is ADD? Is it different than ADHD?

When people speak of ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) or ADHD, they generally mean the same thing. However, only ADHD is the "official" term.

What causes ADHD?

ADHD is not caused by dysfunctional parenting, and those with ADHD do not merely lack intelligence or discipline.

Strong scientific evidence supports the conclusion that ADHD is a biologically-based disorder. Biological studies suggest that children with ADHD may have lower levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine in critical regions of the brain.

Other theories suggest that cigarette, alcohol, and drug use during pregnancy or exposure to environmental toxins, such as lead, may be linked to the development of ADHD. Research also suggests a strong genetic basis to ADHD-the disorder tends to run in families. In addition, research has shown that certain forms of genes related to the dopamine neurotransmitter system are linked to increased likelihood of the disorder.

How can ADHD be treated?

Many treatments – some with good scientific basis, some without – have been recommended for individuals with ADHD. The most proven treatments are medication and behavioral therapy.

Medication

Stimulants are the most widely used drugs for treating attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. These drugs increase activity in parts of the brain that are underactive in patients with ADHD, improving attention and reducing impulsiveness, hyperactivity, and/or aggressive behavior. Talk to your health care provider about other drugs which may be helpful in treating this disorder. Most recently, the FDA has approved a non-stimulant medication, a selective norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor for the treatment of ADHD.

Every person reacts to treatment differently, so it is important to work closely and communicate openly with your physician. Some common side effects of stimulant medications include weight loss, decreased appetite, trouble sleeping, and in children, a temporary slowness in growth; however, these reactions can often be controlled by dosage adjustments. Medication has proven effective in the short-term treatment of more than 76 percent of individuals with ADHD.

Behavioral Therapy

Treatment strategies, such as rewarding positive behavior changes and communicating clear expectations of those with ADHD, have also proven effective. Additionally, it is extremely important for family members and teachers or employers to remain patient and understanding.

Children with ADHD can additionally benefit from caregivers paying close attention to their progress, adapting classroom environments to accommodate their needs, and using positive reinforcers. Where appropriate, parents should work with the school district to plan an individualized education program.

Other Treatments

There are a variety of other treatment options offered (some rather dubious) for those with ADHD. Those treatments not scientifically proven to work include biofeedback, special diets, allergy treatment, megavitamins, chiropractic adjustment, and special-colored glasses.

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