

Adult ADHD

DEFINITION

Adult attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a mental health condition exhibited by difficulty maintaining attention, as well as hyperactivity and impulsive behavior. Adult ADHD symptoms can lead to a number of problems, including unstable relationships, poor work or school performance, and low self-esteem.

ADHD always starts in early childhood, but in some cases it's not diagnosed until later in life. It was once thought that ADHD was limited to childhood. But symptoms frequently persist into adulthood. For some people, adult ADHD causes significant problems that improve with treatment.

Treatment for adult ADHD is similar to treatment for childhood ADHD, and includes stimulant drugs or other medications, psychological counseling (psychotherapy), and treatment for any mental health conditions that occur along with adult ADHD.

(Source: Reprinted from the MayoClinic.com article "ADHD: Definition" <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/adult-adhd/DS01161>)

SYMPTOMS

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) has been called attention-deficit disorder (ADD) and hyperactivity. But ADHD is the preferred term because it includes the two main aspects of the condition: inattention and hyperactive-impulsive behavior.

Adult ADHD symptoms may include:

- Trouble focusing or concentrating
- Restlessness
- Impulsivity
- Difficulty completing tasks
- Disorganization
- Low frustration tolerance
- Frequent mood swings
- Hot temper
- Trouble coping with stress
- Unstable relationships

Many adults with ADHD aren't aware they have it — they just know that everyday tasks can be a challenge. Adults with ADHD may find it difficult to focus and prioritize, leading to missed deadlines and forgotten meetings or social plans. The inability to control impulses can range from impatience waiting in line or driving in traffic to mood swings and outbursts of anger.

All adults with ADHD had ADHD as children, even if it was never diagnosed. Some people with ADHD have fewer symptoms as they age, while others continue to have significant symptoms as adults.

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CAUSES

While the exact cause of ADHD is not clear, research efforts continue.

Multiple factors have been implicated in the development of ADHD. It can run in families, and studies indicate that genes may play a role. Certain environmental factors also may increase risk, as can problems with the central nervous system at key moments in development.

(Source: Reprinted from the MayoClinic.com article "ADHD: Causes" <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/adhd/DS01161/DSECTION=causes>)

RISK FACTORS

You're potentially at increased risk of ADHD if:

- You have blood relatives (such as a parent or sibling) with ADHD or another mental health disorder
- Your mother smoked, drank alcohol or used drugs during pregnancy
- Your mother was exposed to environmental poisons — such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) — during pregnancy
- As a child, you were exposed to environmental toxins — such as lead, found mainly in paint and pipes in older buildings
- You were born prematurely

(Source: Reprinted from the MayoClinic.com article "ADHD: Risk Factors" <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/adhd/DS01161/DSECTION=risk-factors>)

COMPLICATIONS

ADHD has been linked to:

- Poor school performance
- Trouble with the law
- Problems at work
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Frequent car accidents or other accidents
- Unstable relationships
- Financial stress
- Poor physical and mental health

Although ADHD doesn't cause other psychological or developmental conditions, a number of other disorders often occur along with ADHD. These include:

- **Mood disorders.** Many adults with ADHD also have depression, bipolar disorder or another mood disorder. While mood problems aren't necessarily due directly to ADHD, a repeated pattern of failures and frustrations due to ADHD can worsen depression.

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- **Anxiety disorders.** Anxiety disorders occur fairly often in adults with ADHD. Anxiety disorder may cause overwhelming worry, nervousness and other symptoms. Anxiety can be made worse by the challenges and setbacks caused by ADHD.
- **Personality disorders.** Adults with ADHD are at increased risk of personality disorders, such as borderline personality disorder or antisocial personality disorder.
- **Learning disabilities.** Adults with ADHD may score lower on academic testing than would be expected for their age, intelligence and education.

(Source: Reprinted from the MayoClinic.com article "ADHD: Complications" <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/adult-adhd/DS01161/DSECTION=complications>)