

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a common condition. It affects around 5% of children. In the UK, severe ADHD is sometimes also known as hyperkinetic disorder (HKD). Here we will use the most common term, ADHD. Around 1% to 2% of school-aged children will have the most severe form of ADHD. ADHD is more common in boys than in girls.

The symptoms of ADHD can vary but will include high levels of activity and impulsive behaviour and problems with poor concentration. These symptoms affect all parts of your child's life, for example how they cope at home, at school and in other social settings. They will have caused significant problems for more than six months.

Children with ADHD often have extra problems with:

- learning
- managing their emotions
- sleep and
- co-ordination.

Children with ADHD can have problems at school and with getting on with other people.

What causes ADHD?

The exact cause of ADHD is not clear. There are probably many causes of ADHD. ADHD is not generally caused by poor parenting or diet. It can run in families.

Where can I get help?

You may have your own worries about your child's behaviour, or school staff or others involved in helping your child may have pointed out problems. If you think your child may have ADHD, you should discuss your worries with your GP.

If your GP thinks your child has ADHD, they will refer them for specialist advice. They will usually refer your child to a mental health professional (such as a psychiatrist) or a paediatrician (a doctor who specialises in the care of children). In some areas of Scotland, your child can be referred to these specialists by their head teacher, an educational psychologist or another professional involved in caring for your child.

Who are the specialists and what will they do?

The specialist you are referred to is likely to be a mental health professional working within your local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service ('CAMHS'), or a paediatrician.

You, your child and often the whole family may be invited to the first appointment. The health professional will talk to you about your child's problems and about other things, such as what your child does well. They will usually ask permission to contact your child's teachers, to find out more about how your child copes at school. They will often ask you and staff at your child's school to fill in questionnaires so they can get more information.

It is important for the health professional to find out whether your child has ADHD and if there are any other difficulties.

Because the health professional needs a lot of information, the assessment process and diagnosis may take several months.

What is the treatment for ADHD?

The treatment recommended for your child will depend on how severe the problems are and how much they are interfering with your child's life at school and at home. The health professional should involve you and your child in planning treatment. The treatment plan will be most effective if everyone who is involved with your child supports the plan.

Treatment and support may include the following:

- Medication
 - Psychostimulants such as methylphenidate and dexamfetamine are most commonly used. They are called 'stimulants' because they stimulate the parts of the brain affected by ADHD.
 - There are many different types of methylphenidate tablets and capsules. Some tablets, known as immediate-release tablets are effective straight away, but only last for a few hours. Other tablets or capsules are made so that the medicine is released slowly and continually throughout the day. If your child is prescribed slow-release tablets, such as Concerta XL, Medikinet XL or Equasym XL, they may only need to take one dose of medicine a day (usually in the morning).
 - The dose of medicine will be tailored to your child's needs and depends on their response and any side effects.
 - Stimulant medicines may cause side effects, but most are not serious. Some common side effects include:
 - often feeling a lot less hungry
 - stomach ache
 - feeling sick
 - headaches and
 - trouble sleeping.
 - Some children's growth may be affected while they are taking psychostimulant medication.
 - Psychostimulants and other medicines used to treat ADHD do not cause a 'high'.
 - ADHD symptoms might come back when your child's medication wears off, but there are no 'withdrawal symptoms' or any evidence that people start to depend on the medication.
 - Your child's doctor will monitor their medication carefully. If psychostimulant medicine is not successful, a different type of medicine may be used. This is most likely to be a medicine called atomoxetine. It is not a 'stimulant' and its helpful effects may not be seen for several weeks. It has similar side effects to the psychostimulants.
- Training sessions for parents on how to manage their child's behaviour. Children with ADHD can be difficult to manage at home, and many parents find these sessions very helpful.
- Working with your child's school, class teacher and educational psychologist on consistent ways to manage their behaviour.
- Extra support for your child's learning at school.

What about diet and other therapies?

There is currently no good scientific evidence to suggest that any particular diets or other therapies are effective in treating ADHD. However, it is important that your child has a healthy and balanced diet, and if your child seems to have a bad reaction to a specific food or ingredient, you should avoid it.

Will my child grow out of ADHD?

The symptoms of ADHD reduce in some children as they get older. About two thirds of children with ADHD continue to have problems as teenagers and some of them continue to have problems and to need treatment when they are adults.

Useful contacts

ADD Information Service (ADDISS)

PO Box 340

Edgware

Middlesex, HA8 9HL

Phone: 020 8952 2800 • Fax: 020 8952 2909

Email: info@addiss.co.uk

Disability Living Allowance

Phone: 0800 88 22 00 • Textphone: 0800 24 33 55

Website: www.dwp.gov.uk/eservice

MIND (National Association for Mental Health)

Website: www.mind.org.uk/Information/BookletsUnderstanding/Understanding+ADHD.html

Royal College of Psychiatrists

Website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo/mentalhealthandgrowingup/5adhdhyperkineticdisorder.aspx

The Young Minds Parents' Information Service

102-108 Clerkenwell Road

London, EC1M 5SA

Phone: 0800 018 2138

