



Tourette syndrome and ADHD

About half of children and young people with Tourette syndrome (TS) also have a condition called Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This information sheet explains about ADHD, the effects it might have on your everyday life and how you can learn to cope better with it. It forms part of our TS information pack for young people and families.

What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition where a child or young person has trouble paying attention, is a great deal more energetic than others of a similar age and cannot control certain impulses. In everyday life, these children can get labelled as 'difficult' or 'out of control' and their parents are sometimes regarded as 'bad parents'. We know that this is not the case as ADHD is a brain condition and is not simply bad behaviour.

How is ADHD diagnosed?

There are no specific tests used to diagnose ADHD. The diagnosis is made through observation and history taking, and sometimes by use of questionnaires. There are some standards for diagnosing ADHD, agreed internationally:

Attention deficit

A child or young person with attention deficit would show many of the following for at least six months:

- Does not pay attention to detail or makes silly mistakes when working and playing
- Does not finish jobs or is not able to pay attention for long periods while playing

- Does not seem to listen to instructions
- Does not carry out instructions or finish tasks
- Is disorganised and loses things
- Avoids things that might take some effort over a long period of time, such as homework or hobbies
- Easily distracted and forgetful

Hyperactivity

A child or young person who is hyperactive would show most of the following for at least six months:

- Is always on the go, rarely sitting down quietly
- Very noisy when playing even during quiet play
- Does not stay sitting, even during sit-down activities
- Fidgets a lot when sitting

Impulsivity

A child or young person should show one of the following for at least six months:

- Gives answers to questions before the question has finished
- Has trouble waiting in line or taking turns during play
- Interrupts others conversations or games
- Talks a great deal in inappropriate settings and does not realise social boundaries

How does it affect friends and family?

Living with someone who has ADHD can be exhausting. Parents often say that they feel worn out just from making sure their child with ADHD does not get into trouble. Going out and about might be difficult if the child is constantly 'on the go' and does not understand the 'rules' that come with social occasions. Brothers and sisters may also find it hard if much attention is focussed on their brother or sister, and as they grow older, might feel embarrassed by his or her behaviour. All these feelings are normal.

Ways of coping

- The most important thing is to remember that the child or young person is not behaving badly on purpose. The switch in his or her brain that normally tells us to slow down and be careful does not work very well. They cannot easily help behaving the way they do.
- Getting help from your family doctor or specialist doctor will make a big difference. There are various ways of treating ADHD, which often have a dramatic effect.
- Talk to someone if it all feels too much. This is true for all family members, because there will be times when it gets more difficult to cope.

How can ADHD be treated?

There are many ways of helping a child or young person with ADHD:

Medicines

There is one type of medicine called methylphenidate (brand name Ritalin®) that has been shown to be very successful in calming down children with ADHD and helping increase their attention span. There are other related medicines that also work well. For more information about this, please see our medicine information sheet.

Organisation

Having a set routine can make a difference to how a child or young person with ADHD copes with everyday life. As part of this, clear boundaries should be set so everyone knows what behaviour is expected. Any instructions to the child must be very clear. Give concrete instructions rather than abstract ones. For example, say 'put the toys in the box, and the books on the shelf, please' rather than 'tidy your room please' Reward schemes for appropriate behaviour can be very successful.

Talking therapies

There are lots of different types of these and it may take some time to find the right one. Parents may benefit from meeting with a psychologist to discuss behavioural management approaches for their child. Family therapy involves the whole family and tries to find new and better ways of dealing with any problems so that living together becomes easier. If the child needs help for depression, anxiety or other related problems, they might benefit from cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). CBT deals with the way a child or young person is thinking and then how they react to these thoughts





NHS

Learning support

Children and young people with ADHD may struggle at school due to their symptoms and may feel 'left behind' by their classmates. Arranging learning support with the school through an Individual Education Plan can make a huge difference. It is best to discuss this with the class teacher or Special Education needs co-ordinator at the school. Some children with ADHD have additional learning difficulties, and these may need to be investigated by asking the educational psychologist to carry out tests and puzzles with the child (psychometric testing).

Where to get help

The first step should be your family doctor (GP). He or she can refer you to a specialist if needed for diagnosis and treatment, and can also advise you about treatments available in your local area. There are many support organisations for people with ADHD too, so ask at your local library for details.

Where can I find more information?

If you have a specific question or concern, talk to a member of the TS team. The following organisations may also be able to offer support and advice:

ADDISS (The National Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service)

10 Station Road
Mill Hill

London NW7 2JU

Tel: 020 8906 9068

Website: www.addiss.co.uk

Hyperactive Children's Support Group
71 Whyke Lane

Chichester

West Sussex PO19 7PD

Tel: 01243 539966

Website: www.hacsg.org.uk

adders.org

45 Vincent Close

Broadstairs

Kent CT10 2ND

Tel: 01843 851145

Web: www.adders.org

Notes

Compiled by the Tourette syndrome clinic in collaboration with the Child and Family Information Group

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www.goshfamilies.nhs.uk www.childrenfirst.nhs.uk