

what is ADHD?

questions from teens



Attention-deficit/hyperactivity

disorder (ADHD) is a condition of the brain that makes it difficult for people to concentrate or pay attention in certain areas where it is easy for others, like school or homework. The following are quick answers to some common questions:

Q: What causes ADHD?

A: There isn't just one cause. Research shows that

- ADHD is a medical condition caused by small changes in how the brain works. It seems to be related to 2 chemicals in your brain called *dopamine* and *norepinephrine*. These chemicals help send messages between nerve cells in the brain—especially those areas of the brain that control attention and activity level.
- ADHD most often runs in families.
- In a few people with ADHD, being born prematurely or being exposed to alcohol during the pregnancy can contribute to ADHD.
- Immunizations and eating too much sugar do NOT cause ADHD. And there isn't enough evidence that shows allergies and food additives cause ADHD.

Q: How can you tell if someone has ADHD?

A: You can't tell if someone has ADHD just by looks. People with ADHD don't look any different, but how they act may make them stand out from the crowd. Some people with ADHD are very hyperactive (they move around a lot and are not able to sit still) and have behavior problems that are obvious to everyone. Other people with ADHD are quiet and more laid back on the outside, but on the inside struggle with attention to schoolwork and other tasks. They are distracted by people and things around them when they try to study; they may have trouble organizing schoolwork or forget to turn in assignments.

Q: Can ADHD cause someone to act up or get in trouble?

A: Having ADHD can cause you to struggle in school or have problems controlling your behavior. Some people may say or think that your struggles and problems are because you are bad, lazy, or not smart. But they're wrong. It's important that you get help so your impulses don't get you into serious trouble.

Q: Don't little kids who have ADHD outgrow it by the time they are teens?

A: Often kids with the hyperactive kind of ADHD get less hyperactive as they get into their teens, but usually they still have a lot of difficulty paying attention, remembering what they have read, and getting their work done. They may or may not have other behavior problems. Some kids with ADHD have never been hyperactive at all, but usually their attention problems also continue into their teens.

Q: If I have trouble with homework or tests, do I have ADHD?

A: There could be many reasons why a student struggles with schoolwork and tests. ADHD could be one reason. It may or may not be, but your doctor is the best person to say for sure. Kids with ADHD often say it's hard to concentrate, focus on a task (for example, schoolwork, chores, or a job), manage their time, and finish tasks. This could explain why they may have trouble with schoolwork and tests. Whatever the problem, there are many people willing to help you. You need to find the approach that works best for you.

Q: Does having ADHD mean a person is not very smart?

A: Absolutely not! People who have trouble paying attention may have problems in school, but that doesn't mean they're not smart. In fact, some people with ADHD are very smart, but may not be able to reach their potential in school until they get treatment.

ADHD is a common problem. Teens with ADHD have the potential to do well in school and live a normal life with the right treatment.

Q: Is ADHD more common in boys?

A: More boys than girls are diagnosed with ADHD—about 2 or 3 boys to every 1 girl. However, these numbers do not include the number of girls with the inattentive type of ADHD who are not diagnosed. Girls with the inattentive type of ADHD tend to be overlooked entirely or do not attract attention until they are older.

Q: What do I do if I think I have ADHD?

A: Don't be afraid to talk with your parents or other adults that you trust. Together you can meet with your doctor and find out if you really have ADHD. If you do, your doctor will help you learn how to live with ADHD and find ways to deal with your condition.

The persons whose photographs are depicted in this publication are professional models. They have no relation to the issues discussed. Any characters they are portraying are fictional.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

American Academy of Pediatrics
Web site—www.HealthyChildren.org

Copyright © 2011
American Academy of Pediatrics
All rights reserved.