

ADHD

Attention deficit and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders are names given to disorders that may begin in childhood and continue into adulthood impacting the person's ability to function at home, work, or school and in interpersonal relationships. Symptoms may include but are not limited to hyperactivity or restlessness, inattentiveness, and impulsivity. Symptoms may change over time and must be noted to be inappropriate to the individual's age. For example, inattentiveness as a child may become restlessness in the adult with the disorder.

There are three types of ADHD. The first is the Combined Type which is the most commonly diagnosed. This type includes symptoms of inattentiveness and hyperactivity or impulsivity. The second type is Inattentive ADHD previously known as Attention Deficit Disorder or ADD. This type is characterized by impaired attention and concentration. Finally the last type is Hyperactive-Impulsive ADHD which symptoms include hyperactivity and impulsivity without the presence of inattentiveness.

In order for a diagnosis of ADHD to be made, some of the symptoms must have been present prior to age seven. These symptoms must be noted in more than one setting; perhaps school or work in addition to interpersonal relationships. These symptoms cause a noted impairment in the ability to function during everyday activities of daily living.

There is no single test to diagnose ADHD. Diagnosis is based on criteria noted by the American Psychiatric Association in the DSM IV. There are rating scales that may be used, personal history or observations made by a licensed professional.

Various medications can be used to attempt to manage the resulting symptoms. The first of which are psychostimulant medications which help to focus thoughts and help the client ignore distractions. These medications are noted to be effective in approximately 70-80% of the population diagnosed. These medications include: Adderall, Concerta, Dexedrine, Focalin, Metadate, Ritalin, Vyvanase, Daytrana and Quillivant XR. If stimulant medications do not prove effective or cause intolerable side effects, there is a small group of nonstimulant medications such as Strattera which may prove effective. Other psychotropic medications used include Elavil, Norpramine, Pamelor, Catapres, Tenex and Wellbutrin. The side effects from stimulant medications include decreased appetite and possible weight loss, sleep difficulties, headaches and jitteriness. Some serious side effects including cardiovascular disorders, psychosis, depression and anxiety may also occur. These side effects can usually be resolved by changing the dose or adjusting the dosing schedule or possibly changing the medication.

There are several strategies for helping students succeed in school with ADHD. Due to a decreased attention span, assignments should be brief and longer projects broken down into simpler and smaller parts. Students with ADHD have a difficult time maintaining attention. Teacher directed activities as opposed to independent seat work activities tend to assist in maintaining attention. Another helpful strategy may include peer tutoring which provides frequent and immediate feedback from a peer and not an adult which may help keep the ADHD child engaged in the activity at hand. Providing assistance with lecture outlines and or notes may help to reinforce the main ideas of the lesson improving focus and attention. Finally rules and expectations should be reinforced through repetition and visual cues.