

## Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, describes a condition in children who experience difficulties with their length of attention span, impulse control or hyperactivity. ADHD affects a child's ability to concentrate, learn and maintain a normal level of activity. Youngsters with this condition can also develop emotional, social and family problems because of the frustrations and difficulties they experience.

With treatment, a child with ADHD can learn to cope with daily demands. Without treatment, however, studies show that these children may face an increased risk of delinquency and substance abuse.

Thought to be ten times more common in boys than girls, approximately three to ten percent of all children may be affected by ADHD. In about half of all cases, children first show signs of the condition before the age of four, but are most often diagnosed when they are in elementary school.

The problems associated with ADHD are in three primary categories — attention difficulties, impulse control and hyperactivity.

In the classroom, the child with ADHD has difficulty paying attention to what he or she is supposed to be doing. Maintaining concentration is a problem for the student and ADHD children are easily bored and distracted.

Controlling impulsive behavior is an ongoing problem for ADHD children. They tend to act without considering the consequences. They switch quickly from activity to activity and often behave dangerously, seemingly without realizing the seriousness of the risks they are taking.

Their hyperactive behavior is apparent to most all who come in contact with ADHD children. Regulating their activity to match the demands of the environment is a continuing struggle. They fidget, wiggle, squirm and play with any available object. This behavior seems haphazard and not directed to any goal.

What causes ADHD in children? There does not seem to be a single, clearly agreed upon cause of ADHD. Rather, there are different factors which seem to interact to cause the disorder. These factors include genetic components, environmental influences and physical and psychological conditions.

What are the signs and symptoms of ADHD? A child with ADHD behaves in the following ways:

- Fidgets, squirms or seems restless in situations when most others are relaxed
- Has difficulty remaining seated
- Is easily distracted
- Has difficulty following instructions (continued)

- Finds it hard to play quietly
- Doesn't always listen to direction or criticism
- Talks excessively
- Interrupts or intrudes on others, preventing quiet or cooperative group play

Academic difficulties are another problem experienced by ADHD children. A related issue is that ADHD children can experience difficulty relating to their peers in social situations. They find it difficult to follow rules, wait their turns and fit into the activity chosen by the group. This often leads to the rejection of the ADHD child. The child, in turn, then seeks out younger friends who are more tolerant of his behavior.

What should you if you believe that your child is suffering from ADHD? Fortunately, ADHD is a treatable condition and children often respond well to medication and counseling. The first step is to have the child thoroughly evaluated by a mental health professional. Based on this evaluation, the most appropriate form of treatment can be recommended.

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