

## ADHD – an overview

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a developmental problem which results in poor concentration and control of impulses. It can affect children's learning and social skills, and also family functioning. It is not an illness. With medical treatment, understanding and care, a child with ADHD can live a normal life. About 3–5 of every 100 children in Australia have ADHD. It is much more common in boys than girls.

### Symptoms and diagnosis

The diagnosis of ADHD must be made by a trained and experienced health professional, using information from both the family and the school. It is important to make sure the symptoms are not caused by something else, which may need different treatment.

Common signs and symptoms are:

- **Inattention**  
Difficulty concentrating, forgetting instructions, moving from one task to another without completing anything.
- **Impulsivity**  
Talking over the top of others, losing control of emotions easily, being accident prone.
- **Overactivity**  
Constant fidgeting and restlessness.

It is important to remember that all young children have a limited attention span and sometimes do things without thinking. A diagnosis can only be made after a range of information is collected – especially by parents. The symptoms must be obvious in most areas of the child's life. There is no single test. If you are concerned about your child, see your GP who can arrange a referral to a paediatrician, or child psychiatrist to make the assessment.

### Treatment for ADHD

#### Medication

At this point, stimulant medication is the single most effective treatment for the symptoms of ADHD. Stimulants became a standard treatment in the 1980s and approximately 1–2% of all Australian children are prescribed stimulant medication. Any side effects can usually be controlled with changes to the dose and strength.

See the factsheet: [ADHD – Stimulant Medication](#)

## Behaviour strategies

Positive parenting, home and classroom strategies such as keeping structure, boosting self-esteem, building social skills, planning the physical and learning environment all help. Sometimes counseling for the child or the family is also needed.

See the factsheet: ADHD – ways to help children with ADHD

## Key points to remember

- Children with ADHD need support and understanding from family and teachers.
- Not all children who are inattentive, impulsive and overactive have ADHD.
- No single test can diagnose ADHD. Assessment by a doctor or psychologist involves putting together lots of pieces of information to make a diagnosis.
- Medication, positive parenting strategies, school support and counselling can help most children with ADHD and their families.

## For more information

- Support Group  
ACTIVE Inc., 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, 3000  
Tel: (03) 9650-2570
- Factsheets:  
ADHD – Stimulant medication  
ADHD – ways to help children with ADHD  
Fish oils
- You and your ADD child, Ian Wallace, Harper Collins 1996.
- ADHD: The Facts, Mark Selikowitz, Oxford University Press 2004
- Understanding ADHD, Green C. & Chee K., Doubleday, Sydney 2001.

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