

Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): Treating Your Child or Teen

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a common disorder. It makes it hard for a child to focus and pay attention. Some kids may be hyperactive. Or they have trouble being patient. ADHD can make it hard for a child or teen to do well in school or behave at home.

ADHD can be treated. Doctors and specialists can help. You should take part in the decisions.

What causes ADHD?

No one knows for sure. ADHD probably comes from a combination of things. Some possibilities are:

- Genetics - the disorder sometimes runs in families.
- Lead in old paint and in plumbing parts
- Smoking and drinking alcohol during pregnancy
- Certain brain injuries
- Food additives such as artificial coloring - this might make hyperactivity worse.

Some people think refined sugar causes ADHD. But most research does not support the idea that sugar causes ADHD.

What are the symptoms?

ADHD has many symptoms. Some symptoms at first may look like normal behaviors for a child. But ADHD makes them much worse and occur more often. Children with ADHD have at least six symptoms that start in the first five or six years of their lives.

Children with ADHD may:

- Get distracted easily and forget things often
- Switch too quickly from one activity to the next
- Have trouble with directions
- Daydream too much
- Have trouble finishing tasks like homework or chores
- Lose toys, books and school supplies often
- Fidget and squirm a lot
- Talk nonstop and interrupt people
- Run around a lot

- Touch and play with everything they see
- Be very impatient
- Blurt out inappropriate comments
- Have trouble controlling their emotions

How do I know if my child has ADHD?

Your child's doctor may make a diagnosis. Or sometimes the doctor may refer you to a mental health specialist who is more experienced with ADHD. There is no single test that can tell if your child has ADHD.

It can take months for a doctor or specialist to know if your child has ADHD. He or she needs time to watch your child and check for other problems. The specialist may want to talk to you, your family, your child's teachers and others.

How do children with ADHD get better?

Children with ADHD can get better with treatment. But there is no cure. There are three basic types of treatment:

1. Medication. Several medications can help. The most common types are called stimulants. Medications can help children focus, learn and stay calm.

Sometimes medications cause side effects, such as sleep problems or stomach aches. Before your child starts taking medications:

- Learn as much as you can about them. Ask questions. Know what to expect and when.
- Learn about all other treatment options available to your child.

Magellan has published a "monograph." This is a paper that talks about medications used to treat behavioral health problems, such as ADHD. It focuses on the safe use of medications to treat children. This guide can help you and your doctor make informed decisions together. For more information about the guide, [go to our website](#).

Your child may need to try a few medications to see which one works best. You and your doctor must watch your child closely while he or she is taking medicine.

2. Therapy. There are different kinds of therapy. Behavioral therapy helps teach children to control their behavior. This helps them do better at school and at home.

3. Medication and therapy combined. Many children do well with both medication and therapy.

How can I help my child?

Give your child guidance and understanding. A specialist can show you how to help your child make positive changes. Supporting your child helps everyone in your family. Also, talk to your child's teachers. Some children with ADHD can get special services.

Content of this document has been adapted from the website of the National Institute of Mental Health (www.nimh.nih.gov).

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