

About ADHD

DSM-5 Criteria for ADHD

People with ADHD show a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity–impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development:

1. **Inattention**: Six or more symptoms of inattention for children up to age 16 years, or five or more for adolescents age 17 years and older and adults; symptoms of inattention have been present for at least 6 months, and they are inappropriate for developmental level:
 - Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, at work, or with other activities.
 - Often has trouble holding attention on tasks or play activities.
 - Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.
 - Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (e.g., loses focus, side-tracked).
 - Often has trouble organizing tasks and activities.
 - Often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to do tasks that require mental effort over a long period of time (such as schoolwork or homework).
 - Often loses things necessary for tasks and activities (e.g. school materials, pencils, books, tools, wallets, keys, paperwork, eyeglasses, mobile telephones).
 - Is often easily distracted
 - Is often forgetful in daily activities.

2. **Hyperactivity and Impulsivity**: Six or more symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity for children up to age 16 years, or five or more for adolescents age 17 years and older and adults; symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity have been present for at least 6 months to an extent that is disruptive and inappropriate for the person’s developmental level:
 - Often fidgets with or taps hands or feet, or squirms in seat.
 - Often leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected.
 - Often runs about or climbs in situations where it is not appropriate (adolescents or adults may be limited to feeling restless).
 - Often unable to play or take part in leisure activities quietly.
 - Is often “on the go” acting as if “driven by a motor”.
 - Often talks excessively.
 - Often blurts out an answer before a question has been completed.
 - Often has trouble waiting their turn.
 - Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations or games)

In addition, the following conditions must be met:

- Several inattentive or hyperactive-impulsive symptoms were present before age 12 years.
- Several symptoms are present in two or more settings, (such as at home, school, or work; with friends or relatives; in other activities).
- There is clear evidence that the symptoms interfere with, or reduce the quality of, social, school, or work functioning.
- The symptoms are not better explained by another mental disorder (such as a mood disorder, anxiety disorder, dissociative disorder, or a personality disorder). The symptoms do not happen only during schizophrenia or another psychotic disorder.

Based on the types of symptoms, three kinds (presentations) of ADHD can occur:

- *Combined Presentation*: if enough symptoms of both criteria inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity were present for the past 6 months
- *Predominantly Inattentive Presentation*: if enough symptoms of inattention, but not hyperactivity-impulsivity, were present for the past six months
- *Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation*: if enough symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity, but not inattention, were present for the past six months.

Because symptoms can change over time, the presentation may change over time as well.

Diagnosing ADHD in Adults

ADHD often lasts into adulthood. To diagnose ADHD in adults and adolescents age 17 years or older, only 5 symptoms are needed instead of the 6 needed for younger children. Symptoms might look different at older ages. For example, in adults, hyperactivity may appear as extreme restlessness or wearing others out with their activity.

For more information about diagnosis and treatment throughout the lifespan, please visit the websites of the [National Resource Center on ADHD](#) and the [National Institutes of Mental Health](#).

Reference

American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition. Arlington, VA., American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

Additional Information on three ADHD Presentations

Inattentive type

Inattentive refers to challenges with staying on task, focusing, and organization. For a diagnosis of this type of ADHD, six (or five for individuals who are 17 years old or older) of the following symptoms occur frequently:

- Doesn't pay close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in school or job tasks.
- Has problems staying focused on tasks or activities, such as during lectures, conversations or long reading.
- Does not seem to listen when spoken to (i.e., seems to be elsewhere).
- Does not follow through on instructions and doesn't complete schoolwork, chores or job duties (may start tasks but quickly loses focus).
- Has problems organizing tasks and work (for instance, does not manage time well; has messy, disorganized work; misses deadlines).
- Avoids or dislikes tasks that require sustained mental effort, such as preparing reports and completing forms.
- Often loses things needed for tasks or daily life, such as school papers, books, keys, wallet, cell phone and eyeglasses.
- Is easily distracted.
- Forgets daily tasks, such as doing chores and running errands. Older teens and adults may forget to return phone calls, pay bills and keep appointments.

Hyperactive/impulsive type

Hyperactivity refers to excessive movement such as fidgeting, excessive energy, not sitting still, and being talkative. *Impulsivity* refers to decisions or actions taken without thinking through the consequences. For a diagnosis of this type of ADHD, six (or five for individuals who are 17 years old or older) of the following symptoms occur frequently:

- Fidgets with or taps hands or feet, or squirms in seat.
- Not able to stay seated (in classroom, workplace).
- Runs about or climbs where it is inappropriate.
- Unable to play or do leisure activities quietly.
- Always "on the go," as if driven by a motor.
- Talks too much.
- Blurts out an answer before a question has been finished (for instance may finish people's sentences, can't wait to speak in conversations).
- Has difficulty waiting for his or her turn, such as while waiting in line.
- Interrupts or intrudes on others (for instance, cuts into conversations, games or activities, or starts using other people's things without permission). Older teens and adults may take over what others are doing.

Combined type

This type of ADHD is diagnosed when both criteria for both inattentive and hyperactive/impulse types are met.

ADHD is typically diagnosed by mental health providers or primary care providers. A psychiatric evaluation will include a description of symptoms from the patient and caregivers, completion of scales and questionnaires by patient, caregivers and teachers, complete psychiatric and medical history, family history, and information regarding education, environment, and upbringing. It may also include a referral for medical evaluation to rule out other medical conditions.

It is important to note that several conditions can mimic ADHD such as learning disorders, mood disorders, anxiety, substance use, head injuries, thyroid conditions, and use of some medications such as steroids (Austerman, 2015). ADHD may also co-exist with other mental health conditions, such as oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder, anxiety disorders, and learning disorders (Austerman, 2015). Thus, a full psychiatric evaluation is very important. There are no specific blood tests or routine imaging for ADHD diagnosis. Sometimes, patients may be referred for additional psychological testing (such as neuropsychological or psychoeducational testing) or may undergo computer-based tests to assess the severity of symptoms.

Reference

<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/adhd/what-is-adhd>

Symptoms in adults

In adults, the symptoms of ADHD are more difficult to define. This is largely due to a lack of research into adults with ADHD.

As ADHD is a developmental disorder, it's believed it cannot develop in adults without it first appearing during childhood. But symptoms of ADHD in children and teenagers often continue into adulthood.

The way in which inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness affect adults can be very different from the way they affect children.

For example, hyperactivity tends to decrease in adults, while inattentiveness tends to remain as the pressures of adult life increase.

Adult symptoms of ADHD also tend to be far more subtle than childhood symptoms.

Some specialists have suggested the following as a list of symptoms associated with ADHD in adults:

- carelessness and lack of attention to detail
- continually starting new tasks before finishing old ones
- poor organisational skills

- inability to focus or prioritise
- continually losing or misplacing things
- forgetfulness
- restlessness and edginess
- difficulty keeping quiet, and speaking out of turn
- blurting out responses and often interrupting others
- mood swings, irritability and a quick temper
- inability to deal with stress
- extreme impatience
- taking risks in activities, often with little or no regard for personal safety or the safety of others – for example, driving dangerously

Related conditions in adults with ADHD

As with ADHD in children and teenagers, ADHD in adults can occur alongside several related problems or conditions.

One of the most common is depression. Other conditions that adults may have alongside ADHD include:

- personality disorders – conditions in which an individual differs significantly from the average person in terms of how they think, perceive, feel or relate to others
- bipolar disorder – a condition affecting your mood, which can swing from one extreme to another
- obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) – a condition that causes obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviour

The behavioural problems associated with ADHD can also cause problems such as difficulties with relationships and social interaction.

Reference:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/symptoms/>