

UNDERSTANDING ATTENTION-DEFICIT/ HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

Young Adult: Get the Facts

What does it mean
when a health care
professional says
“attention-deficit/
hyperactivity
disorder”?



Hearing a health care professional say you have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can be confusing. The good news is that the emotions and behaviors you have been concerned about are actually symptoms of a treatable disorder. By getting treatment and entering recovery, people with ADHD can manage their symptoms, concentrate better and lead productive and meaningful lives. Recovery does not necessarily mean a cure. It does mean that people are actively moving towards wellness.

My advice is to find out
as much information as
you possibly can about
your diagnosis, treatment
options, and supports
around you. Information
can give you power.

—Haley, Youth

It is important to talk with a health care provider about treatment options and additional information. Your provider may be a child and adolescent psychiatrist, general psychiatrist, psychologist, pediatrician, social worker, or other health care provider. If you are concerned that you may have ADHD, it is important to seek a thorough evaluation. The evaluation includes talking about your symptoms, blood and urine tests, and perhaps other tests to ensure that there is no underlying medical condition that could be causing the symptoms. Additionally, neuropsychological and/or psychosocial testing of ADHD can be helpful in determining a diagnosis. It is also important to ensure that you can tolerate medication, if recommended as part of the treatment plan.

What do we mean by recovery?

Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.¹

Recovery focuses on wellness and resilience, encouraging [people] to participate actively in their own care.²



Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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What is ADHD?



ADHD is typically an ongoing disorder. In adolescence and adulthood, the hyperactive symptoms will diminish but the organizational and attentional challenges will persist. However, treatment that involves medications and other elements of an individualized treatment program can help you to be more resilient, manage the disorder, improve your everyday functioning, and achieve your personal goals. An individualized treatment program can include positive family and peer support or specialized educational programming.

ADHD is marked by a persistent pattern of inattentive and/or hyperactive and impulsive behavior. These behaviors interfere with day-to-day activities in school, at work, or in social situations. A person with ADHD may have a hard time paying attention, following instructions, organizing and carrying out complex activities. You might lose things, be forgetful, be easily distracted, and have a feeling of being “driven.” Some people with ADHD are hyperactive—symptoms of this include difficulty waiting or taking turns, fidgeting or squirming, always “on the go,” and not being able to sit still. The diagnosis of ADHD can be made in older youth and adults. However, for the diagnosis of ADHD, symptoms must have appeared prior to age 12.

What caused this?

Researchers and health care professionals do not completely understand what causes ADHD. It is unlikely that a single factor causes ADHD. It is most likely caused by a combination of things such as genetics (i.e. a family history of ADHD), chemical or other changes in the brain, and/or environmental factors. Traumatic experiences can also contribute to the development of psychiatric disorders. If you have experienced a traumatic incident, it is critical to share that information with your mental health specialist and pediatrician.

How common is this disorder?

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that the rate of ADHD among 3-18-year-olds is in the range of 6.8 percent to 8.9 percent.⁴

What do we mean by resilience?

Resilience is the ability to respond to stress, anxiety, trauma, crisis, or disaster. It is critical in recovery [from mental disorders].³

What are the treatment approaches?

ADHD can be managed in many ways. This includes the use of behavioral therapy, or with a combination of medication, behavioral therapy, and support from family and friends. If you are of consenting age, you may need to provide written consent for parents or caregivers to participate on the treatment team. It is important to talk to your health care providers about other types of treatment, such as complementary medicine, as well as programs that can provide additional support related to education, employment, housing, and vocation and career development. It is also important to have good self-care, such as a healthy diet, exercise, sleep, and abstinence from illicit drugs. You should collaborate with your family and with your health care providers to consider treatment options. Decisions should be made that fit your own priorities and goals.

When I started seeing a therapist as a teenager, I found it was such a great opportunity. It was a place for me to deal with the challenges I was facing and learn skills that would give me strength.
—Sean, Youth

Medications

Medications can help manage many of the symptoms of ADHD. Stimulant medications are the most common treatment for ADHD. Each person reacts differently to these medications. For that reason, the prescribing health care professional may try different doses and different kinds of medication before finding the most effective approach for you. Finding the best medication and the most effective dose may take time. For some people who have mild symptoms of ADHD, the health care professional may not need to prescribe medication.

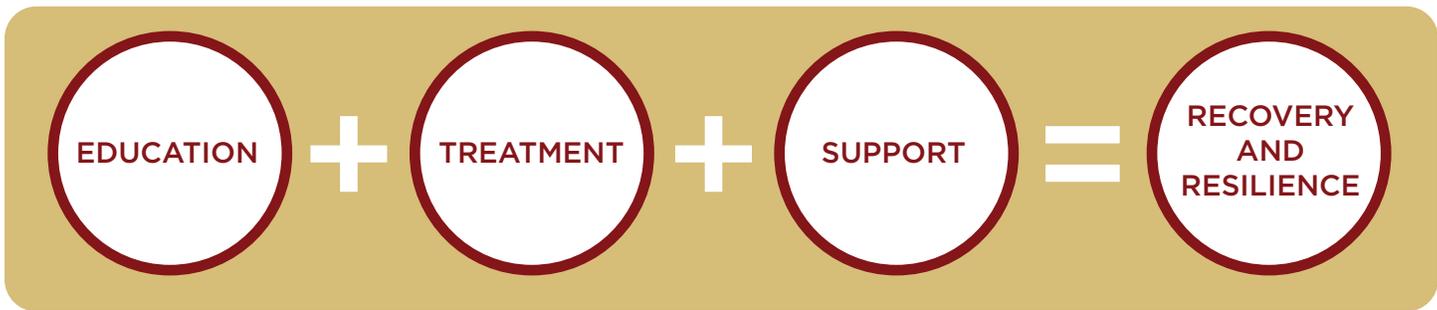
Therapy

Health care professionals may recommend behavioral therapy, or training to help your parents learn ways to support you, as stand alone treatment or in combination with medications. Therapy can give you tools to better help you manage your symptoms, and to organize, schedule, and manage your family obligations, work and social life.

Support

Your family or peers that have managed similar challenges can be an important part of your treatment team for ADHD. Talking with peers lets you learn from others who are further along in recovery. If invited to be a part of your treatment team, these individuals can help you recognize ADHD-related behaviors before they become a problem. These partners can provide valuable support and encouragement, so you can stay focused on your recovery and life goals.

It is important to tell your health care provider(s) about all of your symptoms, such as any particular fears, your feelings in social situations, or persistent/worsening low mood that may be bothering you. Be sure to report any problems or habit changes to your prescriber, including any use of drugs or medications, smoking, excessive caffeine (e.g., energy drinks), or alcohol. Self-medicating yourself with alcohol or drugs can complicate your treatment and make your symptoms worse. If you have thoughts or plans to harm yourself or others, contact your prescriber or the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255)** or via the web chat function at <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org> immediately.



Where can I learn more and get support?



- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**
http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Anxiety_Disorder_Resource_Center/Home.aspx
- Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**
<http://www.chadd.org>
- Find Youth Info**
<http://www.findyouthinfo.gov>
- Mental Health America**
<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness**
<http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/ADHD>
- National Center for Complementary & Integrative Health**
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/integrative-health>
- National Institute of Mental Health**
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/index.shtml>
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>
 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Ok2Talk**
<http://ok2talk.org>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**
<http://www.samhsa.gov/disorders/mental>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline:** <http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>
- Teen Mental Health**
<http://teenmentalhealth.org/learn/mental-disorders/adhd>
- Youth Motivating Others through Voices of Experience**
<http://www.youthmovenational.org>

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- ² American Psychiatric Association. (2005). *Position Statement on Use of the Concept of Recovery*.
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- ⁴ Perou, R., Bitsko, R. H., Blumberg, S. J., Pastor, P., Ghandour, R. M., Gfroerer, J. C., et al. (2013). *Mental Health Surveillance Among Children - United States, 2005-2011*. Retrieved from: http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/su6202a1.htm?s_cid=su6202a1_w

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