

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a pattern of inattentive and/or hyperactive behavior that results in limited executive functioning and poor self-regulation. *Inattention* refers to things like wandering off task and being disorganized, while *hyperactivity* refers to things like excessive fidgeting or talkativeness. Individuals with ADHD may also be *impulsive*, which refers to things like hasty decision-making, interrupting others, or an inability to delay gratification. *Executive function* and *self-regulation* skills are the skills that allow you to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and manage multiple tasks successfully. These skills include things like time management, organization, problem solving, impulse control, and emotional management. Keep reading to learn more about adult ADHD, how it is diagnosed, and ways therapy can help you develop skills necessary to effectively manage ADHD.

Adult ADHD

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 4.4% of U.S. adults have ADHD. Many adults seek treatment for ADHD when they've had difficulties in multiple areas of their life. Adult ADHD, for example, can lead to unstable relationships, poor work or school performance, low self-esteem, and other problems. While symptoms of ADHD start in early childhood, many individuals do not recognize their difficulties may be due to ADHD until they are adults. By this time, their ADHD symptoms may not be as clear as ADHD symptoms in children, but struggles with impulsiveness, restlessness, and difficulty paying attention may continue. Symptoms that often lead to adults being diagnosed with ADHD include:

- Poor or inconsistent work performance
- Difficulties managing daily tasks
- Difficulties keeping things organized
- Difficulties paying bills
- Difficulties with time management
- Frequently forgetting appointments or other important dates
- Strong emotional reactions to minor things
- Constant feelings of stress and worry caused by difficulties with everyday tasks
- Constant feelings of frustration about not meeting goals or accomplishing tasks
- Relationship problems caused by disorganization or forgetfulness

How is ADHD Diagnosed?

There are three different types of ADHD. These types of ADHD are known as the Predominantly Inattentive Presentation, the Predominantly Hyperactive/Impulsive Presentation, and the Combined Presentation. These types of ADHD supersede prior Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) diagnoses and are described as follows:

- **Predominantly inattentive presentation:** Individuals with the predominantly inattentive presentation of ADHD experience symptoms mostly in the area of inattention; things

like, poor attention to detail, difficulty remaining focused, being easily distracted, avoiding tasks that may take a sustained amount of effort, or forgetfulness in daily activities.

- **Predominantly hyperactive/impulsive presentation:** The predominantly hyperactive/impulsive presentation is characterized by symptoms such as fidgeting, restlessness, excessive talking, or interrupting or intruding on others.
- **Combined presentation:** Individuals with the combined presentation of ADHD have symptoms of both inattention and hyperactivity.

Your specific ADHD diagnosis depends on the symptoms you exhibit in school, work, and home situations. There are several ways individuals may obtain this diagnosis. Many people seek a diagnosis from their primary care physician. During a regular office visit, your primary care physician may listen to you describe your ADHD symptoms, make a diagnosis, and prescribe medications. Alternatively, your primary care physician may refer you to a psychologist for a diagnostic evaluation. During this evaluation, the psychologist will listen to your personal history and administer several tests. Based on this evaluation, your primary care physician may then confirm the diagnosis, prescribe medication, and recommend ongoing therapy for increased executive functioning skills and symptom management.

How is ADHD Treated?

ADHD treatment depends on the severity of your symptoms and your personal goals. Typically, treatment consists of a combination of medication, lifestyle changes, and therapy. During therapy, your therapist may utilize a variety of interventions to help you obtain your goals and increase your coping strategies. Some of the leading ADHD researchers in the world, Russell Ramsay and Anthony Rostain¹, identified four categories of interventions to help individuals with ADHD increase coping strategies in their lives. These categories include:

- **Cognitive Interventions:** Interventions that help individuals identify unhelpful thinking patterns and develop more adaptive ways of thinking.
- **Behavioral Interventions:** Interventions that help individuals develop adaptive behavioral routines to improve initiation and follow through on tasks.
- **Implementation Interventions:** Interventions that help individuals increase motivation and self-regulation skills.
- **Acceptance-Mindfulness Interventions:** Interventions that help individuals recognize and normalize their struggles with ADHD.

When used in combination, these forms of treatment are typically effective for most adults with ADHD. However, it is important to keep in mind that because of the nature of ADHD, many individuals experience relapses in the lifestyle changes they've developed. Nevertheless, with ongoing therapy and support, most individuals eventually develop better coping skills and an increase in their ability to manage their challenges with ADHD.

¹ Ramsay, J. R., & Rostain, A. L. *Cognitive-behavioral therapy for adult ADHD: An integrative and psychosocial medical approach* (2nd ed.). Routledge.