



ADHD: Information for Parents, Caregivers and Families

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is characterized by inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), ADHD is most commonly diagnosed in young people. An estimated 9% of children between ages 3-17 have ADHD. While ADHD is usually diagnosed in childhood, it does not only affect children. An estimated 4% of adults have ADHD.

Symptoms

Many behaviors associated with ADHD are normal, however, someone with ADHD will have difficulty controlling these behaviors and show them much more frequently.

Signs of inattention:

- Becoming easily distracted and jumping from activity to activity
- Becoming bored with a task quickly
- Difficulty focusing attention or completing a single task or activity
- Trouble completing or turning in homework assignments
- Losing things such as school supplies or toys
- Not listening or paying attention when spoken to
- Daydreaming or wandering with lack of motivation
- Difficulty processing information quickly
- Struggling to follow directions

Signs of hyperactivity:

- Fidgeting and squirming, having trouble sitting still
- Non-stop talking
- Touching or playing with everything
- Difficulty doing quiet tasks or activities

Signs of impulsivity:

- Impatience
- Acting without regard for consequences, blurting things out
- Difficulty taking turns, waiting or sharing
- Interrupting others

References:

www.cdc.gov
www.nami.org
www.ffcmh.org



ADHD: Information for Parents, Caregivers and Families

Causes

There are several factors believed to contribute to ADHD:

Genetics: Research shows that a person's genetics may cause a high risk of developing ADHD which often runs in families and some trends in specific brain areas that contribute to attention.

Environmental factors: Studies show a link between exposure to cigarette smoking and alcohol use during pregnancy and children who have ADHD. Exposure to lead as a child has also been shown to increase the likelihood of ADHD in children.

Diagnosis

ADHD is most often seen and diagnosed in childhood. Getting a diagnosis can sometimes be difficult because the symptoms are similar to typical behavior in most young children. Teachers are often the first to notice symptoms because they see children in a learning environment with peers every day. There is no one single test that can diagnose a child with ADHD, so meet with a doctor or mental health professional. The goal is to rule out any outside causes for symptoms, such as environmental changes, difficulty in school, medical problems and ensure that a child is otherwise healthy.

Treatment

The most effective treatment plans uniquely tailored to an individual's needs and implemented early on. They should take into consideration learning style and potentially include medication that can be prescribed by a pediatrician, general practitioner or mental health professional. Commonly prescribed medications include both stimulants and non-stimulants. Stimulants are usually the first choice for treating ADHD. If effective, medications can improve attention span, the ability to deal with frustration and ultimately lead to better relationships with teachers, family members and peers.

A doctor or mental health professional may also want to incorporate behavioral therapy into the treatment plan. Having structure and routine, as well as clear expectations of what is allowed and not allowed in terms of behavior and outbursts can help a child learn and feel more in control of their own life. Behavior therapy can also help improve social skills, such as sharing and interacting with peers.



ADHD: Information for Parents, Caregivers and Families

Additional and Holistic Treatment Approaches

There are many thoughts on holistic approaches to treating ADHD. A few are listed below. We encourage you to discuss these with your child's doctor as possible compliments to your child's treatment plan.

Diet: Based on the theory that people are sensitive to sugar and artificially added colors, flavors and preservatives, eliminating these substances from a child's diet could improve learning and behavioral problems.

Nutritional supplements:

- Omega-3s, are thought to help the deficiency of fatty acids that are sometimes associated with ADHD. Adding these to a child's diet may improve symptoms.
- Gut-brain supplements may also improve treatment outcomes. There are numerous products available to support gut-brain health that parents and caregivers can explore.

Support for Parents and Caregivers

There are a number of resources available to help parents and caregivers who are concerned about their child's mental health or who are looking for supports and services for their child who has a behavioral health diagnosis. We encourage you to explore the following:

- Missouri Families 4 Families - www.mofamilies4families.com
- MPACT Parent Training & Information - www.missouriparentsact.org

MISSOURI FAMILIES 4 FAMILIES
(573) 619-1322 | MOFAM4FAM@GMAIL.COM

MOF4F represents families from around the state by being a voice for families on state and local committees and advocating for families who have children/youth with mental health needs.