

What is ADHD?

I used to follow the same routine every time. I'd check the project details and due dates, add them to my calendar, and sometimes even gather supplies. I felt prepared. But after that, the project would cease to exist in my mind. Weeks would pass, and reminders didn't really sink in. The night before the deadline, I'd scramble to finish everything. Afterward, I'd be too wired to sleep and end up tired and stressed the next day.

At that point, I believed my challenges stemmed from procrastination or a lack of motivation.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I had time-blindness—meaning I had trouble sensing how much time had passed or how long tasks would take, which is a common experience in people with ADHD.

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) affects millions of people around the world. While we are still learning about ADHD, we know some things. Once thought to be a childhood disorder, it is now understood to affect adults as well. Understanding what ADHD is can clear up common misconceptions, such as it being only a childhood disorder.

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how the brain regulates attention, time, motivation, and actions, not how much someone knows.

People with ADHD don't lack attention; they have trouble regulating it. Their attention can be inconsistent, drawn to interesting or urgent things, making it harder to focus on less engaging tasks. This helps explain why many people with ADHD experience hyperfocus, but not always when it is wanted or on important matters.

ADHD often runs in families, with many genes playing a role. Environment also matters, including early experiences and stress.

Different parts of the brain work together, so ADHD doesn't come from just one area. For example, the prefrontal cortex, which is the front part of the brain that helps with planning and self-control, often develops more slowly and works a bit differently in people with ADHD. There are also differences in how the brain regulates and uses neurotransmitters like dopamine and norepinephrine. These chemicals help send signals between brain cells.

There are three presentations of ADHD: inattentive, hyperactive-impulsive, and combined.

Children and adults with inattentive ADHD are often not diagnosed because their presentation is not disruptive. The child with inattentive ADHD is quiet and often daydreams. They may miss directions, forget steps in problem-solving, and lose important items, among other symptoms.

Hyperactive-impulsive ADHD looks like what many people picture when they think of ADHD. People with this type may have lots of energy when others are supposed to be still, find it hard to wait, and often talk more than expected. They might interrupt others or act on impulse.

People who have both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive symptoms have a combined presentation. Many people with ADHD experience traits of both, even if one is more prominent.

ADHD can affect people of any intelligence level. Having ADHD doesn't mean someone lacks skills or knowledge. ADHD affects how people perform, not what they are capable of.

People with ADHD can focus, but not always when they want to or on what matters most. This is why they often deal with procrastination, hyperfocus, and motivation that comes and goes. They may also have trouble with relationships, school, or work, and are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and burnout.

ADHD also brings strengths. Many people with ADHD are creative, curious, flexible thinkers, and strong problem-solvers—especially when they are engaged in something meaningful or interesting.

How do I know if I have ADHD?

It's important to be diagnosed by a mental health professional, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or social worker, or by a medical provider, such as a pediatrician, neurologist, or nurse practitioner. This evaluation is conducted through interviews, questionnaires, and sometimes input from others who know you well. ADHD is often missed or mistaken for something else, and it can occur with other conditions like anxiety and depression.

Diagnosis is based on your symptoms and personal history. Right now, there isn't a single test that can diagnose ADHD.

What can I do if I have ADHD?

Research shows that medication helps with ADHD by regulating dopamine and norepinephrine signaling. Other supports include therapy, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which teaches coping skills, and ADHD coaching to build on strengths and manage challenges. Using both medication and these supports together often works best.

Is ADHD the same as Executive Function?

ADHD and executive function are different, but closely related. Executive function is not a diagnosis; it refers to a set of skills—such as organizing, planning, remembering, and completing tasks—that help us manage everyday life. Most people

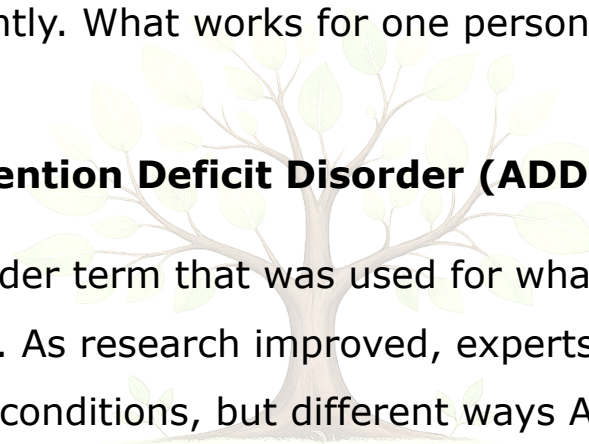
with ADHD have trouble with executive functioning, but not everyone who struggles with these skills has ADHD.

Do people with the same type of ADHD all have the same symptoms?

No—everyone with ADHD is different. That’s why generic templates and tools are only a starting point. Everyone’s strengths and struggles are different, and people respond to strategies differently. What works for one person may frustrate another.

What about Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)?

ADD is an older term that was used for what we now call inattentive ADHD. As research improved, experts realized these weren’t separate conditions, but different ways ADHD can show up. Today, ADHD is used as the umbrella term.



References

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