

# Mental Health

## Fact Sheet

Rimrock  
Foundation

Mental Health Services

## Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder



UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF ADHD?

RELATED DISORDERS CAN  
ACCOMPANY ADHD

WHAT CAUSES ADHD?

CAN ADHD BE CURED?

THE PATH TO HEALING

### Understanding the Problem

On the average, at least one child in every classroom in America needs help for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This disorder often continues into adulthood and it can cause a lifetime of emotional pain if not diagnosed and treated.

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, once called hyperkinesia or minimal brain dysfunction, affects 3 to 5 percent of all children, perhaps as many as 2 million in America. Two to three times more boys than girls are affected. But there is help and reason for hope.**

In the last decade, we have learned much about the course of this disorder and are now able to identify and treat children, adolescents, and adults who have it. Today, a variety of medications, behavior-changing therapies, and educational options are available to help people with ADHD focus their attention, build self-esteem, and function in new ways.

## What are the Symptoms of ADHD?

At present, ADHD is a diagnosis applied to children and adults who consistently display certain characteristic behaviors over a period of time. The person's pattern of behavior is compared against a set of criteria and characteristics of the disorder, which appear in a medical diagnostic reference book called the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). **The most common behaviors fall into three categories: inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.**

- **Inattention**

People who are inattentive have a hard time keeping their mind on any one thing and may get bored with a task after only a few minutes. They may give effortless, automatic attention to activities and things they enjoy. However, focusing deliberate, conscious attention to organizing and completing a task or learning something new, is difficult.

- **Hyperactivity**

People who are hyperactive always seem to be in motion. They can't sit still. They may dash around or talk incessantly. Sitting still through a lesson can be an impossible task. Hyperactive teens and adults may feel intensely restless, bouncing around from one activity to the next.

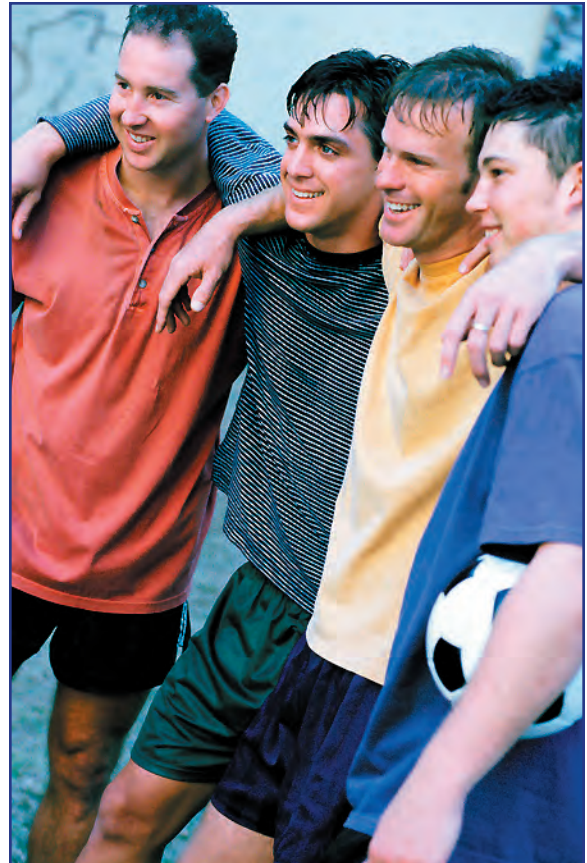
- **Impulsivity**

People who are overly impulsive seem unable to curb their immediate reactions or think before they act. They may blurt out inappropriate comments. They may run into the street without looking. Their impulsivity may make it hard for them to wait for things they want or to take their turn in games. These behaviors appear early in life (before age 7) and continue for at least 6 months, with symptoms that may be more frequent or severe than in others of the same age.

- **What Can Look Like ADHD**

- Under-achievement at school due to a learning disability
- Attention lapses caused by petit mal seizures
- A middle ear infection that causes an intermittent hearing problem
- Disruptive or unresponsive behavior due to anxiety or depression

The fact is, many things can produce these behaviors. Anything from chronic fear to mild seizures can make a child seem overactive, quarrelsome, impulsive, or inattentive. ADHD is a serious diagnosis that may require long-term treatment with counseling and medication. So it's important that caregivers first look for and treat any other causes of these behaviors.



## Related Disorders Can Accompany ADHD

Nearly half of all children with ADHD—mostly boys—tend to have another condition, called Oppositional Defiant Disorder. At times, children with this diagnosis may overreact or lash out when they feel bad about themselves. They may be stubborn, have outbursts of temper, or act belligerent or defiant.

A very small proportion of people with ADHD have a rare disorder called Tourette's syndrome. People with Tourette's have tics and other movements like eye blinks or facial twitches that they cannot control. Others may grimace, shrug, sniff, or bark out words. Fortunately, these behaviors can often be controlled with medication. At some point, many children with ADHD - mostly younger children and boys - experience other emotional disorders. About one-fourth feel anxious.

### What Causes ADHD?

Health professionals stress that since no one knows what causes ADHD, it doesn't help parents to look backward to search for possible reasons. There are too many possibilities to pin down the cause with certainty. It is far more important for the family to move forward in finding ways to get the right help. More and more evidence suggests that ADHD results from biological causes and not the home environment. Not all children from unstable or dysfunctional homes have ADHD. Knowing this can remove a huge burden of guilt from parents who might blame themselves for their child's behavior.



### Can ADHD be Outgrown or Cured?

Even though people don't normally outgrow ADHD, most do learn to adapt and live fulfilling lives - not by being cured, but by developing their personal strengths.

**With effective combinations of medicine, new skills, and emotional support, people with ADHD can now develop ways to control their attention and minimize their disruptive behaviors.** They may find that by structuring tasks and controlling their environment, they can achieve personal goals, or they may learn to channel their excess energy into sports and other high energy activities that build on their strengths and abilities.

### The Path to Healing

Knowing the differences in qualifications and services can help the family choose someone who can best meet their needs. Besides school psychologists, there are several types of specialists qualified to diagnose and treat ADHD, including child psychiatrists who are doctors specializing in diagnosing and treating childhood mental and behavioral disorders.

Many children with ADHD or other disabilities are able to receive special education services under the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act" (IDEA). This act guarantees appropriate services and a

public education to people, ages 3 to 21, with disabilities. Qualifying for services under the National Rehabilitation Act is often called “504 eligibility.”

For decades, medications have been used to treat the symptoms of ADHD. Medications in the class of drugs known as stimulants seem to be the most effective in both children and adults. As useful as some of these drugs are, Ritalin and the other stimulants have sparked a great deal of controversy. Most doctors feel the potential side effects should be carefully weighed against the benefits before prescribing the drugs. While on these medications, some children may lose weight, have less appetite, and temporarily grow more slowly. Others may have problems falling asleep.



Therapists can help children or adults with ADHD learn to feel better about themselves. Current clinical treatment options available include:

- **Psychotherapy** - works to help people with ADHD to like and accept themselves despite their disorder. In psychotherapy, patients talk with the therapist about upsetting thoughts and feelings, explore self-defeating patterns of behavior, and learn alternative ways to handle their emotions.
- **Cognitive-behavioral therapy** - helps people work on immediate issues. Rather than helping people understand their feelings and actions, it supports them directly in changing their behavior. The support might be practical assistance, like helping them learn to think through tasks and organize their work.
- **Support groups** - connect people who have common concerns. Many adults with ADHD and parents of children with ADHD find it useful to join a local or national support group. Members of support groups share frustrations and successes, referrals to qualified specialists, and information about what works, as well as their hopes for themselves and their children.
- **Parenting skills training** - offered by therapists or in special classes, gives parents tools and techniques for managing their child’s behavior. Parents may also be taught to give the child “quality time” each day, in which they share a pleasurable or relaxed activity.

Therapists can usually help people with ADHD in identifying and building on their strengths, coping with daily problems, and controlling their attention and aggression.

**For further information on Rimrock Foundation’s treatment of ADHD, call Jen Porter, Admissions Supervisor, at 1-800-227-3953 or 1-406-248-3175, visit our website at [www.rimrock.org](http://www.rimrock.org), or contact the Rimrock Foundation Library at the above numbers.**

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