

What are the treatments for ADHD?

Many people with ADHD will find that the same treatments that were effective for them as children will continue to be effective during adulthood. For adults who are just beginning treatment for ADHD, psychiatric medications may be indicated. All treatment decisions should be discussed with one's physicians as the risks and benefits for each individual may vary.

Many people will choose to be treated with stimulant medications, e.g., methylphenidate (Ritalin), dextroamphetamine (Dexedrine) or amphetamine salts (Adderall). These medications are generally thought to be "first-line treatments" and may be effective in more than 50 percent of individuals. Some people taking these medications will find that they have problems sleeping or decreased appetite. Other people may be at risk for heart problems including high blood pressure, arrhythmias, or even stroke.

Recovery

Recovery does not mean that the illness has gone into complete remission. Over time, and after what for many can be a long and difficult process, individuals can come to terms with their illness by first learning to accept it and then moving beyond it.

This includes learning coping mechanisms, believing in themselves as individuals by learning their strengths as well as their limitations, and coming to realize that they do have the capacity to find purpose and enjoyment in their lives in spite of their illness. **RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE!**

How to Get Help

No insurance? Call the NAMI Southern Arizona office to help guide you to access mental health services.

If you have ADHD:

- ◆ Seek medical care through a psychiatrist and/or your primary care physician.
- ◆ Find the right combination of treatment that works for you which may include medication, therapy, support groups, etc. **Sometimes people must try several different treatments or combinations of treatment before they find the one that works for them.*
- ◆ Take NAMI's Peer-to-Peer course and/or join the NAMI Connection support group.
- ◆ LEARN about your illness. The more you know, the more you are able to help yourself. Start with NAMI today!

If you are a family member with a loved one who has mental illness:

- ◆ Take care of yourself.
- ◆ Take NAMI's Family-to-Family course, join a Family & Friends Support Group and/or take NAMI Basics if you have a loved one who is a child or adolescent.
- ◆ Family, friends and partners of military service members and veterans can take NAMI's Homefront course.
- ◆ Learn about your loved one's illness.

SHOW YOU CARE. WEAR A SILVER RIBBON.



- Help break down the barriers to treatment and support.
- Help reduce stigma —talk about it!



**FIND HELP.
FIND HOPE.**

Mental illness affects 1 in 5 people. We provide resources and support to all those affected by mental illness.

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ATTENTION-DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

Educational information and local support provided by:



What is attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder?

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a mental illness that is characterized by hyperactive behaviors and difficulty with attention. ADHD is a condition that starts in childhood, one which most experts believe begins before the age of 12. While many people with ADHD will experience a decrease in their symptoms—perhaps even a resolution of their illness in some cases— as they reach adulthood, a significant percentage of people will continue to experience dysfunction and distress during their adult years.

While the number is higher in children, multiple studies suggest that approximately one in twenty-five American adults will meet diagnostic criteria for ADHD. ADHD is more common in males and often occurs with other learning disabilities, substance abuse problems and other mental illnesses such as mood disorders and anxiety disorders.

What are the symptoms of ADHD?

There are actually thought to be three different types of ADHD, each with different symptoms:

- ◆ predominantly inattentive,
- ◆ predominantly hyperactive/impulsive and,
- ◆ combined.

Those living with the predominantly inattentive type often:

- ◆ fail to pay close attention to details or make careless mistakes in schoolwork, work or other activities
- ◆ have difficulty sustaining attention to tasks or leisure activities
- ◆ do not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- ◆ do not follow through on instructions and fail to finish schoolwork, chores or duties in the workplace
- ◆ have difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- ◆ avoid, dislike or are reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort
- ◆ lose things necessary for tasks or activities
- ◆ are easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
- ◆ are forgetful in daily activities

Those living with the predominantly hyperactive/impulsive type often:

- ◆ fidget with their hands or feet or squirm in their seat
- ◆ leave their seat in situations in which remaining seated is expected
- ◆ move excessively or feel restless during situations in which such behavior is inappropriate
- ◆ have difficulty engaging in leisure activities quietly

- ◆ are "on the go" or act as if "driven by a motor"
- ◆ talk excessively
- ◆ blurt out answers before questions have been completed
- ◆ have difficulty awaiting their turn
- ◆ interrupt or intrude on others

Those living with the combined type, the most common type of ADHD, have a combination of the inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive symptoms.

It is also important to note that ADHD is a condition that often coexists with other conditions and people with ADHD experience their symptoms in multiple settings (e.g., academic, work, social or family obligations). For example, a young person who has difficulty paying attention in college classes and also struggles with completing his tasks at work would be a more classic example of an individual with ADHD than an older person who only describes an isolated difficulty with focusing during conversations with his or her spouse.

What causes ADHD and how is it diagnosed?

Scientists have not isolated a single gene that can be said to "cause" ADHD, but scientific studies suggest that people with ADHD may have problems with the chemicals in the brain that control a person's level of alertness and attention (catecholamines).

There is no specific test (e.g., blood test or

x-ray) that can diagnose a person with ADHD. Instead, diagnosis of ADHD is made by a mental health professional based on a clinical assessment that includes a formal history and other information such as academic records, psychological testing, and discussions with parents or other loved ones. Most adults with ADHD will have already been diagnosed— and perhaps treated for this condition— during childhood. For adults that are concerned that they might have ADHD, the first step is to connect with a properly trained mental health professional in order to schedule a face-to-face evaluation of their symptoms.

A proper psychiatric evaluation can be critical. When an adult, specifically one without a prior history of ADHD, experiences new or worsening symptoms of difficulty focusing, he or she may be experiencing symptoms of a medical or psychiatric condition other than ADHD. These conditions could include depression, anxiety or substance abuse (e.g., marijuana or alcohol). Medical illnesses— such as thyroid disease, seizure, or stroke—can also mimic some of the symptoms associated with ADHD. Therefore, in addition to having a psychiatric evaluation, any adult with new symptoms of ADHD should have a physical exam and testing performed by his or her primary care physician in order to screen for common medical conditions that can cause similar symptoms.