

<https://www.additudemag.com/category/manage-adhd-life/adult-diagnosed/>

What Is ADHD? Meaning & Symptoms

ADHD stands for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, a complex brain disorder that impacts approximately 11% of children and almost 5% of adults in the U.S.¹ ADHD is a developmental impairment of the brain's executive functions. People with ADHD have trouble with impulse-control, focusing, and organization.

What Are the 3 Types of ADHD?

Primarily Hyperactive-Impulsive ADHD

People with primarily [hyperactive-impulsive ADHD](#) act “as if driven by a motor” with little impulse control — moving, squirming, and talking at even the most inappropriate times. They are impulsive, impatient, and interrupt others.

Primarily Inattentive ADHD (Formerly ADD)

People with the [inattentive subtype of ADHD](#) have difficulty focusing, finishing tasks, and following instructions. They are easily distracted and forgetful. They may be daydreamers who lose track of homework, cell phones, and conversations with regularity.

Primarily Combined Type ADHD

Individuals with combined-type ADHD display a mixture of all the symptoms outlined above. They must exhibit 6 of the 9 symptoms identified for each sub-type.

What Are the 9 Symptoms of ADHD – Primarily Inattentive Type?

- Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, at work, or during other activities (e.g., overlooks or misses details, work is inaccurate).
- Often has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities (e.g., has difficulty remaining focused during lectures, conversations, or lengthy reading).
- Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly (e.g., mind seems elsewhere,)
- Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (e.g., starts tasks but quickly loses focus and is easily sidetracked).

- Often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities (e.g., difficulty managing sequential tasks; difficulty keeping materials and belongings in order; messy, disorganized work; has poor time management; fails to meet deadlines).
- Often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (e.g., schoolwork or homework; for older adolescents and adults, preparing reports, completing forms, reviewing lengthy papers).
- Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities (e.g., school materials, pencils, books, tools, wallets, keys, paperwork, eyeglasses, mobile telephones).
- Is often easily distracted by extraneous stimuli (for adults, may include unrelated thoughts).
- Is often forgetful in daily activities (e.g., doing chores, running errands; for older adolescents and adults, returning calls, paying bills, keeping appointments).

What Are the 9 Symptoms of ADHD – Primarily Hyperactive-Impulsive Type?

- Often fidgets with or taps hands or feet or squirms in seat.
- Often leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected (e.g., leaves his or her place in the classroom, in the office or other workplace, or in other situations that require remaining in place).
- Often runs about or climbs in situations where it is inappropriate. (Note: In adolescents or adults, may be limited to feeling restless.)
- Often unable to play or engage in leisure activities quietly.
- Is often “on the go,” acting as if “driven by a motor” (e.g., is unable to be or uncomfortable being still for extended time, as in restaurants, meetings; may be experienced by others as being restless or difficult to keep up with).
- Often talks excessively.
- Often blurts out an answer before a question has been completed (e.g., completes people’s sentences; cannot wait for turn in conversation).
- Often has difficulty waiting his or her turn (e.g., while waiting in line).
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations, or activities; may start using other people’s things without asking or receiving permission; for adults, may intrude into or take over what others are doing).”

Adult ADHD: Overview

Adult attention deficit hyperactivity disorder ([ADHD or ADD](#)) is a neurological disorder that affects an estimated 4.4 percent of U.S. adults, and is more commonly diagnosed in men (5.4%) than in women (3.2%)¹. [ADHD](#) in adults is characterized by a persistent pattern of inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsivity that interferes with and impacts work, home life, and relationships – especially if left untreated. ADHD was historically considered a childhood condition, but it is now recognized as a lifelong condition that persists well into adulthood. Persistence rates, however, vary, ranging from 6%¹ to 30%² and perhaps even higher³. Individuals with ADHD may receive a diagnosis in childhood or well into adulthood. Trends show a rise in rates of ADHD diagnoses among U.S. adults in the last decade.⁴

Adult ADHD: Causes

[What causes ADHD?](#) It's not entirely clear, but most research suggests these main factors:

- **Genetics or Heredity:** ADHD is a highly heritable condition. Approximately half of parents with ADHD will have a child with the condition.⁶ Recent genetics research also points to several markers that appear to be associated with ADHD development.¹⁵
- **Environmental Factors:** Studies suggest that exposure to extreme stress, trauma, or certain toxins – like lead¹⁶ or bisphenol-A¹⁷ – increase the risk or severity of ADHD symptoms.
- **Disruption of Development:** Brain injury¹⁸ or events that affect the central nervous system during development, like preterm birth¹⁹ or alcohol use during pregnancy,²⁰

ADHD is not a result of poor diet, inadequate exercise, excessive screen time, or socioeconomic factors – though some of these factors and other stressors may worsen ADHD symptoms in some individuals. And while widely considered a childhood condition, researchers continue to explore whether ADHD onset can occur in adulthood.²¹

What Does ADHD Look Like in Adults?

Adult [ADHD symptoms](#) broadly resemble the common signs of childhood ADHD. However symptom intensity — especially hyperactivity — is known to decrease over time for many individuals.⁶

What are Common Adult ADHD Symptoms?

- **Inattention**
 - Poor attention to detail
 - Difficulty getting started and completing tasks
 - Difficulty focusing and regulating attention
 - Forgetfulness
 - Poor time management, organizational skills
- **Impulsivity**
 - Fidgeting
 - Restlessness
 - Interrupting frequently
 - Talking excessively
- Emotional dysregulation
- Low frustration tolerance

Challenges Associated with Adult ADHD

Adult ADHD impacts virtually every aspect of life, more so if the condition remains undiagnosed, untreated, or ineffectively treated – all of which can have detrimental effects on an individual's psychological well-being and quality of life.⁶

Adult ADHD Impact on School and Work Performance

Adult ADHD symptoms like poor time management and concentration, procrastination, and forgetfulness can and do make school and the workplace difficult to navigate. Many studies have linked ADHD to difficulties in school (including higher education) and in the workplace.⁷ Individuals with ADHD are more likely to face difficulty gaining and maintaining employment compared to neurotypical adults, especially if they did not receive treatment in childhood.⁸

Adult ADHD Impact on Relationships

ADHD symptoms in adults like poor listening skills, low frustration tolerance, inability to follow through with tasks, and impulsivity can lead to a number of difficulties with romantic relationships, friendships, familial relationships, and other social connections.⁵

Adult ADHD Impact on Substance Abuse

ADHD and substance abuse are strongly connected. ADHD adults are twice as likely to be diagnosed with substance use disorder (SUD) compared to individuals without ADHD.¹² Many adults with ADHD and SUD report using substances like alcohol and other drugs as a way to self-medicate and manage ADHD symptoms.¹³

The following table from expert [William Dodson, M.D.](#), shows how childhood symptoms of ADHD can translate to adulthood.

| ADHD in Childhood | >>> | ADHD in Adulthood |
|---|---------------------|---|
| School failure or under-achievement | Becomes | Job failure or underemployment |
| Multiple injuries | Becomes | Car wrecks or risk-taking |
| Drug experimentation | Becomes | Drug dependence |
| Oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder | Becomes | Criminal involvement or antisocial personality disorder |
| Repetitive failure | Becomes | Hopelessness, frustration, resignation |