



About Adult ADHD

What is Adult ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a manageable condition that affects approximately 5% of the world's population.¹ While many people consider ADHD to be a childhood disorder, ADHD is a complex lifelong neurobiological condition.^{2,3}



Being diagnosed with ADHD as an adult actually means the condition has been present since childhood, but it may not have been recognised or correctly diagnosed at the time.⁴ Not all adults with ADHD will exhibit the same behaviours.⁵

ADHD is an umbrella term that includes three subtypes:⁶

1. Predominantly inattentive ADHD

Difficulty organising tasks, poor time management, switching or not completing tasks, difficulty concentrating, making simple mistakes, easily bored, forgetfulness and not appearing to listen.

2. Predominantly hyperactive/impulsive ADHD

Hyperactivity – Restlessness, inability to relax or focus. Moving and talking excessively. Sleeplessness or needing less sleep.³ Feeling nervous or on edge most of the time.

Impulsivity – Acting without thinking, for example impulse buying, interrupting, difficulties with relationships,⁷ taking on too many tasks, recklessness, and risky behaviours.

3. Combined ADHD

All three behaviours are present in fairly equal measures.

Science and ADHD

ADHD is not a 'new' condition, medical science first documented children exhibiting inattentiveness, impulsivity and hyperactivity in 1775.⁸ Studies since then demonstrate that ADHD can have negative impacts on virtually every aspect of daily social, emotional, academic and work functioning.⁷

Research has demonstrated that ADHD has a very strong genetic basis. Experts estimate that when a child is diagnosed with ADHD, there is a good chance that one of their parents will also have the condition.^{2,9}



Symptoms of Adult ADHD

An adult with ADHD may:⁶

- Fail to pay close attention to details or make simple mistakes
- Have difficulty sustaining attention
- Seem not to listen when spoken to directly
- Not follow through on instructions
- Be unable to finish academic tasks or workplace duties
- Have difficulty organising tasks and activities
- Avoid, dislike or be reluctant to perform tasks requiring sustained mental effort
- Lose things necessary for tasks or activities
- Be easily distracted by external stimuli
- Be forgetful in daily activities
- Fidget with hands or feet
- Talk excessively or interrupt others
- Make decisions impulsively

About Adult ADHD

For adults with ADHD, their symptoms may cause significant problems. For example, they may be easily provoked, frustrated, hassled, feel irritable and overreact to ordinary stress. Many are vulnerable to addiction and also have co-existing conditions such as learning difficulties, depression or anxiety.^{7,10}

Adults with ADHD may have difficulty maintaining relationships or holding down a job. If their condition was undiagnosed and untreated in childhood, their academic record may be poor and their future prospects in adult education can be reduced.^{5,7}

“There are many successful people all over the world living with and managing their ADHD well, who lead fulfilling and productive lives.”

Joy Toll OAM, President, ADDults with ADHD (NSW) Inc.



Diagnosis of Adult ADHD

Less than one quarter of adults living with ADHD have been diagnosed.¹¹ Behaviours caused by ADHD in childhood, present themselves differently in adults, and can change throughout a person's lifetime.⁵ Some people may develop coping skills to manage the daily effects of ADHD.²

There may be a number of reasons why a childhood diagnosis of ADHD can be missed. Some of the symptoms associated with certain subtypes of ADHD can be more difficult to recognise during childhood.^{4,6}

In addition, some symptoms of ADHD can be similar to those for anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, autism spectrum disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, personality disorders or other mental illnesses, and in some cases the underlying ADHD can be missed.²

To date, there is no single test to determine whether ADHD is present. Psychiatrists and psychologists may use a combination of methods and assessment tools to diagnose ADHD, including the impact of the symptoms on daily life.²

In order to make a diagnosis of Adult ADHD in Australia, a psychiatrist or psychologist may:

- Consider, and if possible, exclude other conditions that have similar symptoms to ADHD
- Review the person's history to see if they showed any ADHD symptoms in childhood
- Determine that there is a negative impact in at least two different settings such as work and home⁶

An adult diagnosed with ADHD may not have all of the symptoms and those symptoms may vary in severity.⁵

An appropriate medical assessment, diagnosis and comprehensive management plan is vital in order to provide the most effective treatment and support for an adult living with ADHD.^{2,5,7}

Where to find help and information

A healthcare professional who understands or provides treatment for adults with ADHD, including a GP, psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, counsellor or ADHD coach.

ADDults with ADHD Helpline: (02) 9889 5977
www.adultadhd.org.au

References:

1. Polanczyk 2007, 'The worldwide prevalence of ADHD' *Am J Psych* 164(6), pp 942-948.
2. Canadian Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Resource Alliance (CADDRA) 2011, Canadian ADHD Practice Guidelines
3. Sobanski et al. 2008, 'Sleep in Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Before and During Treatment with Methylphenidate: A Controlled Polysomnographic Study' 31 (3): pp 375 - 381.
4. American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), 2011, 'ADHD: Clinical Practice Guideline for Diagnosis' *J Am Ac Pediatrics*, DOI: 10.1542, pp 6.
5. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) 2008, 'Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: Diagnosis and management of ADHD in children, young people and adults' NICE clinical guidelines 72: last modified March 2013
6. American Psychiatric Association (APA) 2000, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed, text revision) (DSM-IV-TR) pp. 85 - 93
7. Young, Fitzgerald and Postma, 2013 'ADHD: making the invisible visible' An Expert White Paper on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
8. Barkley & Peters 2012, 'The Earliest Reference to ADHD in the Medical Literature?' *J Att Dis* 16, 623-630.
9. Curatolo, D'Agati and Moavero, 2010 'The Neurobiological basis of ADHD' *Italian Journal of Pediatrics* DOI: 10.1186/1824-7288-36-79
10. Wilens TE, 2004 'Impact of ADHD and its treatment on substance abuse in adults' *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 65 Suppl 3: 38 - 45
11. Feifel 2008, 'Why diagnose and treat ADHD in Adults?' *Postg Med* 120(3): pp 13-15

This information is not intended as professional advice. Please speak with your healthcare professional if you have any concerns or questions.

This fact sheet is proudly sponsored by
Eli Lilly Australia Pty Ltd, West Ryde, NSW

ADDults with ADHD fact sheet – About Adult ADHD
Version 1 (AUSTR00164d)
(c) ADDults with ADHD (NSW) Inc 2013



ADDults with ADHD (NSW) Inc

ABN 87 819 863 019 Registered Charity

✉ PO Box 22, Epping NSW 1710

☎ 02 9889 5977

@ info@adultadhd.org.au

🌐 www.adultadhd.org.au