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ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) begins before a child is 7 years of age. Symptoms are usually noticed by the time a child is school age. Three to five percent of all children have ADHD. It occurs more often in boys than in girls. Children with ADHD may be bright and creative but may have difficulty with learning or behavior.

SYMPTOMS OF ADHD

There are many symptoms of ADHD. Not all the symptoms listed are present in every child.

Inattention

- Has trouble following directions
- Does not finish tasks
- Often seems not to hear when spoken to directly
- Is easily distracted
- Has trouble concentrating
- Has trouble sticking to an activity
- Makes careless mistakes
- Will not go back over his work to check it
- Is unable to "tune out" background noise
- Notices everything but cannot focus on a task

Impulsiveness

- Acts before thinking
- Shifts activities rapidly
- Has trouble organizing work
- Needs much supervision
- Calls out in class
- Has trouble waiting his turn



Picture 1 The child with ADHD may be easily distracted.

Hyperactivity

- Runs or climbs excessively
- Is always "on the go"
- Has trouble sitting still
- Gets out of his seat in school

Other problems that may go along with ADHD (present in about 70 percent of children with ADHD)

- Is easily frustrated
- Cries easily
- Overreacts and is quick-tempered
- Can develop poor self-esteem
- Has difficulty making and/or keeping friends
- Is socially immature
- Deals poorly with a change in routine

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF ADHD

It is not known what causes ADHD. There are no blood tests or other medical tests that can be used to diagnose ADHD. The diagnosis requires careful information-gathering about how the child behaves and functions at home, at school, and with other adults and children. Also, interviews and questionnaires are used, along with a medical exam to find out if other problems are present.



Picture 2 Pay attention to your child's good traits and reward him with praise.

TREATMENT OF ADHD

Your child's health care provider will work closely with you to help you and your child cope with ADHD. Some testing may be needed to rule out learning disabilities or problems with vision and hearing. Family or individual counseling may be needed. Medicines may be prescribed (Ritalin, Dexedrine, or Adderall are the most common). Medicines may help reduce the symptoms of ADHD.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR CHILD

Schoolwork:

- Work closely with your child's schoolteacher and nurse. You may need to talk with the principal and guidance counselor to be sure your child's learning needs are met.
- Your child may need special tutoring. Ask for that help if it is needed.
- Supervise homework time. Clear your child's desk and reduce distractions (such as radio or TV).
- Encourage activities that your child can excel in, such as sports, art, music, or hobbies.

At Home:

- Increase your child's self-esteem. Praise your child for good behavior. Accept your child for who he is. Focus on his abilities and good traits rather than on his shortcomings. Expect your child to succeed rather than to fail. Give him tasks that he can handle, a little at a time. A job well done boosts the child's self-esteem.
- Set up daily routines. They will give your child structure and a feeling of security. Work on changing only one or two negative behaviors at a time.
- Explain rules clearly and be consistent. Tell your child what will happen if the rules are broken. Write down the rules or have your child repeat them to you.
- Have fun with your child. Play with him. Love him.
- Take care of yourself. If you start to lose patience, take a break.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF ADHD

By working closely with your child's doctor and teachers, you can help your child adjust to ADHD. Most children do not "outgrow" ADHD. But with your help they can learn skills that help them cope, develop self-esteem, and succeed in life.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse.