



“Psychology Works” Fact Sheet: Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

What is attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)?

ADHD is characterized by developmentally inappropriate levels of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, that impair a person’s functioning. Some individuals have problems with all three types of symptoms, whereas others have problems primarily with inattention, or primarily with hyperactivity/impulsivity. Related to problems with inattention, people with ADHD often have difficulty following instructions, keeping things organized, and following through on tasks. Related to problems with hyperactivity and impulsivity, they also may tend to act without thinking, interrupt others, talk excessively, or feel fidgety or restless. ADHD begins in childhood and many individuals continue to show ADHD symptoms into adulthood. ADHD occurs in approximately 5-8% of school-aged children and adolescents, and is more common in males than females.

In addition to the problems with inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, people with ADHD often have academic or employment problems and difficulties in their social interactions and relationships. ADHD often co-occurs with problems such as oppositional defiant or conduct disorder, learning disorders, and depression or anxiety disorders.

ADHD appears to have a biological basis, and for some people, it is an inherited condition. However, the specific cause of the disorder is not known and it may differ for different people; it is likely that multiple possible causes or contributing factors exist. The family environment does not cause ADHD, but it may affect the way that symptoms are expressed, as well as help people manage their ADHD.

There is no one test for ADHD that can determine whether someone has the disorder or not. Instead, assessment requires gathering information from several sources (e.g., parents, teachers, observations, testing), across multiple domains (e.g., home and school), and using standardized measures. Assessment should also carefully consider of other possible causes of ADHD symptoms, such as other disorders or stressors. A thorough assessment can be a complex process, and psychologists are well qualified to conduct such assessments.

What psychological treatments are used to treat ADHD?

For most school-aged children and adolescents, the best treatment for ADHD is a combination of behaviour therapy and medication. Behaviour therapy is particularly important in addressing family stress and social behaviour problems in individuals with ADHD, and may help to prevent or treat other problems that can occur with ADHD.





Behaviour therapy involves many techniques and focuses on establishing clear behavioural expectations for the individual and providing frequent and consistent feedback about behaviour, which could include rewards and consequences. Behaviour therapy can also include modeling, problem-solving, and skills training. For children, behaviour therapy is often conducted both in the classroom and at home, and parents and teachers are essential in implementing the therapy. For adolescents and adults, cognitive-behavioural therapy focused on the individual's self-management of their own behaviours may be useful.

Where do I go for more information?

More information regarding ADHD and effective treatments (psychological and medication) can be found on a website developed by the US National Institute of Health at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/adhd-listing.shtml>

There is also a website of factsheets operated by Children and Adults with ADHD, an advocacy group, at <https://chadd.org/understanding-adhd/adhd-fact-sheets/>

Information about psychological interventions for ADHD can also be found in this article: Evans, S.W., Owens, J.S., Wymbs, B.T., & Ray, A.R. (2018) Evidence-based psychosocial treatments for children and adolescents with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 47:2, 157-198, DOI: 10.1080/15374416.2017.1390757

You can consult with a registered psychologist to find out if psychological interventions might be of help to you. Provincial, territorial and some municipal associations of psychology often maintain referral services. For the names and coordinates of provincial and territorial associations of psychology, go to <https://cpa.ca/public/whatisapsychologist/ptassociations/>.

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Your opinion matters! Please contact us with any questions or comments about any of the *Psychology Works* Fact Sheets: factsheets@cpa.ca

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