

Me, Myself and ADHD

For a better life

What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a common neurodevelopmental disorder found in children and adults of any intellectual ability. It can affect your capacity to focus and can result in restlessness, forgetfulness and inexplicable mood swings.

There are three core symptoms:

- Inattention
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity

However, it's not all negative; there are some positives:

- More enthusiastic
- More creative
- Sensitive
- Good at multi-tasking
- Able to improvise

ADHD affects people in different ways. It's unique, just like you, and you may not experience all of the known symptoms.

How is adult ADHD diagnosed?

ADHD is diagnosed by identifying symptoms that match the criteria listed in the DSM-5 and ICD (medical classification systems used by doctors and mental health professionals to diagnose ADHD).

These include:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Easily bored
- Trouble reading and listening
- Disorganised
- Unable to complete activities
- Restless/fidgety
- Excessive talking
- Chaotic and hectic thought processes
- Not thinking before acting
- Interrupting
- Inappropriate comments

Assessment looks for:

1. Evidence of symptoms in childhood
2. Identification of symptoms in adulthood
3. Verification of diagnostic criteria as laid out in the DSM
4. Diagnosis of any coexisting illnesses

ADHD diagnosis for adults diagnosed in childhood

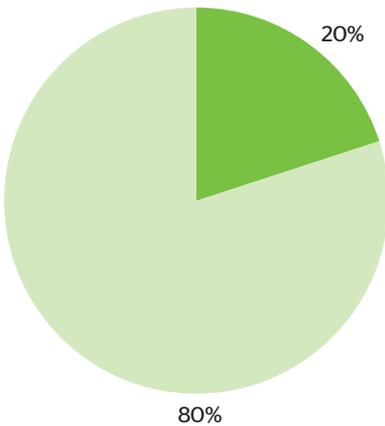
1. Disorganisation
2. Fluctuating moods
3. Specific characteristics relating to anger issues
4. Negative reactions to stress

What to do if you suspect you have ADHD

Make an appointment to see your GP who, if appropriate, can refer you to a specialist, usually a Psychiatrist.

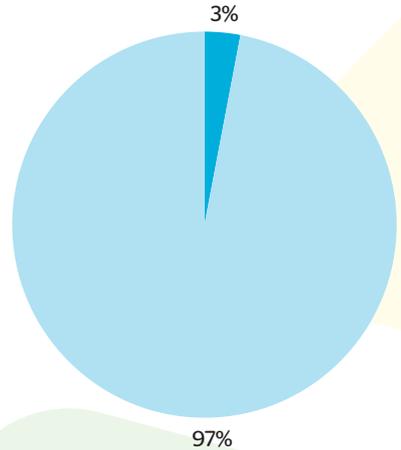
UK Adult Psychiatric Population

- UK adult psychiatric population with ADHD
- UK adult psychiatric population without ADHD



Prevalence of ADHD

- People diagnosed with ADHD
- People not diagnosed with ADHD



Cited in Bushe et al, 2012.

ADHD affects many people around the world in different ways. In a multi-national study of 11,442 individuals aged 18-44, 388 people were diagnosed with ADHD, which is a prevalence of 3.4 per cent. This is depicted in the right hand figure above 'Prevalence of ADHD'.

In the UK psychiatric population, ADHD has been found alongside, or in place of, other mental health conditions in 20% of cases, demonstrating a difference in prevalence between a psychiatric and a general population.

Medications

The medicines used for the treatment of ADHD work by increasing the amount of noradrenaline and dopamine in the brain.

There are two main types of medication for ADHD:

- Short-acting, known as stimulants which typically last between 4-14 hours. These include methylphenidate and dexamphetamine preparations.
- Long-acting, known as non-stimulants which last up to 24 hours, such as atomoxetine.



Therapy

1. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can improve self-esteem, energy, creativity and curiosity in many people with ADHD, helping them to overcome some of the challenges that life presents. CBT identifies problems and discusses solutions that will help change behaviours.
2. Coaching can be used to manage symptoms by identifying your skills and using these to set and achieve goals.
3. Self-help groups give you a perspective that professionals are not able to give. By sharing experiences with similar people you can seek advice and learn ways to live with your ADHD.

Other practical tips to minimise negative affects of ADHD:

1. Don't interrupt conversations, try and wait for your turn. This is hard when you have ADHD.
2. Join various activity groups that you are good at.
3. Keep something with you that you can fiddle.
4. Sit in places that you are less likely to get distracted. For example, sit at the front in a meeting so your back faces the rest of the crowd and do not sit next to windows.
5. Use an egg timer when you are doing tasks to give you a visual idea of how much time you have.
6. If you have to do a big task, break it in to small steps.
7. Sleep is a big problem for people with ADHD. Techniques that can help improve sleep are to switch off the TV and try to avoid using mobile phones or iPads an hour before sleep. Set a routine at night that prepares you to sleep.

How does ADHD impact on your life?

Employment

- Adults with ADHD can be disorganised and erratic when searching and applying for jobs. Due to attention deficits they may avoid tedious tasks such as writing detailed application forms, leading to questions being misunderstood and important information missed out.
- In a job interview, someone with ADHD may come across as friendly and chatty, however, information regarding the person's ability and history may be inaccurate.
- Disclosing an ADHD diagnosis may have implications as some employers may not fully understand the condition and that it can be managed with reasonable adjustments.

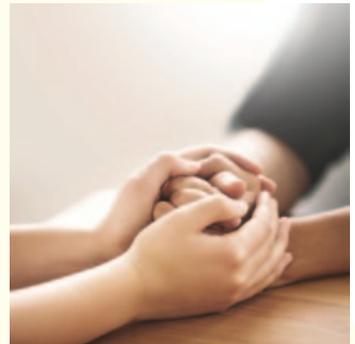


Workplace

- Adult ADHD has been associated with poor job performance, lower occupational status, less job stability and an increased number of absence days in comparison to the general population.
- Common difficulties include poor time management and organisation skills, failing to keep on top of work load and not following instructions.
- Adults with ADHD may also become hyper-focused which, if not managed appropriately, could lead to a potential burnout.
- However, it's not all bad as controlled ADHD in adults can lead to extremely motivated, creative and productive workers.

Family

- Due to the nature of the symptoms i.e. impulsiveness, inattention, lack of self-regulation, relationship and marital problems understandably occur. You may be fed up with the constant nagging from your partner to tidy up, to listen more closely or to get more organised and your partner may feel hurt and annoyed over your perceived irresponsibility and insensitivity.
- If you are a parent, or thinking of starting a family, you need to be aware of the increased risk of your child also having ADHD.
- But it's not all negative. If controlled, your high energy levels and out-of-the-box- thinking can bring new and creative ideas that keep the relationship fresh.



Friendships

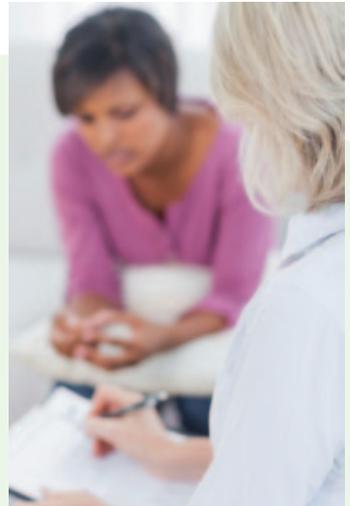
- Maintaining and developing friendships may be difficult due to forgetfulness, disorganisation, excessive talking and interruption.
- If your friends don't share any of your impulsive or high energy behaviours finding common ground may be difficult.
- However, just like all relationships, your energy and creative thinking can lead to exciting and out-going activities.



Physical and Mental Health

There is a variety of health problems associated with ADHD:

- Anxiety
- Substance misuse
- Chronic stress
- Low self esteem
- Compulsive eating
- Neurodevelopmental disorders such as Autism spectrum disorder, OCD, dyslexia and dyspraxia
- Co-morbid disorders and impairments - these are common and include depression and personality disorders
- The rate of sexually transmitted infections are four times higher
- If you are suffering from any mental health issues then seeing your GP is recommended so appropriate referrals can be made.



Driving

- Adults with ADHD are more prone to having accidents.
- The symptoms of ADHD can resemble intoxicated driving.
- Inattention can lead to distraction, especially in low-stimulating driving environments e.g. long distance motorway driving.
- Impulsivity can lead to poorer reactions and symptoms such as poor judgement and thrill-seeking tendencies can contribute to high-risk driving.
- Actions such as turning off phones and knowing driving routes beforehand can help increase attention.
- If you have an ADHD diagnosis, please inform the DVLA.

Strategies outside of CBT

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services offer CBT treatments but they may not be adapted to ADHD. As an alternative, NICE guidelines recommend psychoeducation workshops which provide information about ADHD symptoms and how these can affect you, as well as providing ideas and strategies to help you cope with your symptoms. Psychoeducation is more educational than therapeutic.

Adult ADHD is a new research area so available psychosocial ADHD interventions are lacking. There are other recommendations but these are individualistic and may not work for everyone.

Diet

There is a lack of research that shows a causal link between diet and ADHD symptoms, however, many people find that removing or reducing certain foods such as sugar, additives, or caffeine from their diet helps with controlling symptoms like hyperactivity. Certain food deficiencies i.e. protein can also worsen symptoms. If you believe that some foods are aggravating your symptoms, keep a food diary of what you eat and drink, and what behaviours are exaggerated. Discuss this with your GP, who may refer you to a dietitian.

Exercise

There is no specific research that supports a link between exercise and reducing ADHD symptoms. However, many people have found that exercise improves their symptoms by reducing stress, anxiety and impulsivity.

This is thought to be because when exercising the brain releases similar chemicals to ADHD stimulant medications which have a relaxing effect.



My life with ADHD - written by an adult with ADHD

I don't know how many times I was taken as a child to our GP who would advise my parents to challenge my behaviour with threats and strict parenting. My parents didn't just have me to contend with, but also my younger brother whose behaviour was, at times, even more challenging.

My education was not a pleasant experience. I spent a lot of time in detention and the head's office. I was bright but I found school boring and would rather disrupt a class than listen. No matter how hard I tried, I could not retain what was being said to me. I doubted myself at school; I had no confidence and learnt to mask what I was feeling. I longed to be the centre of attention but in reality I was screaming for someone to help me and understand, instead of brushing me aside, telling me how useless I was.

As I got older I noticed that I was different so I saw my GP who prescribed antidepressants. I often felt threatened, inadequate and had periods of little or no motivation. This manifested in my work and social life, missing shifts and doing things that I now regret.

My relationships were constantly up and down and full of my anger, mood swings, impulsiveness, OCD behaviours and general inability to cope with stress. I bounced from one tempestuous relationship to another.

When my eldest son was diagnosed with ADHD, and later another of my children, I began to identify with their behaviours. I experienced that "eureka" moment that I too could have ADHD. I was often met with "adults don't have ADHD" and after years of trying to find the answers it was confirmed I do have adult ADHD. I was relieved, angry and disappointed, but I had this diagnosis and I thought everything would change...

I was handed my diagnosis and medication and told to find support, but I soon discovered there is very little to be had.

My medication has helped me identify my behaviours and life has got better. I still have melt downs and burn outs but it's finding your limits. So educate yourself and understand your ADHD and most importantly, understand who you are.

Useful links

Occupational issues of adults with ADHD

bmcpsychiatry.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-244X-13-59

ADHD – signs, effects, and treatment

www.helpguide.org/articles/add-adhd/adult-adhd-attention-deficit-disorder.htm

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/Pages/Treatment.aspx

The ADHD diet

www.additudemag.com/adhd/article/6552.html

Adult ADHD and exercise

www.webmd.com/add-adhd/guide/adult-adhd-and-exercise

ADHD in adults

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/adhdinadults.aspx

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Publication ref: A67340/ADHD/V1

Publication date: May 2016