

# Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

## Definition

- Children with ADHD have problems with poor attention span, hyperactivity, and impulsive behavior
- ADHD is a disorder that affects 5% to 7% of children. ADHD is more common in boys than in girls.
- A normal attention span is 3 to 5 minutes per a child's year of age. Therefore, a 2-year-old should be able to concentrate on a particular task for at least 6 minutes. A child entering kindergarten should be able to concentrate for at least 15 minutes. Note: A child's attention span while watching TV is not an accurate measure of their attention span.

## Health Information

### Symptoms of ADHD

- Poor attention span is the main symptom. A child with ADHD has trouble listening when someone talks, finishing a task, or returning to a task if interrupted. (Caution: These can be normal behaviors for many children less than 3 or 4 years old.)
- Hyperactivity: 80% of boys and 50% of girls with ADHD are also hyperactive. A child who has symptoms of hyperactivity is restless, impulsive, and in a hurry.
- Learning Disability: 50% of children also have a learning disability. The most common one is an auditory processing problem. This means they have trouble remembering spoken instructions.
- IQ: the intelligence of most children with ADHD is normal.
- If you suspect that your child has a short attention span, ask another adult (such as a teacher) for what they see.
- ADHD is a diagnosis that is confirmed by standardized tests.

### Causes

- ADHD (like other learning disabilities) is probably due to small differences in brain chemistry and function.
- ADHD often runs in the family.
- ADHD is not caused by poor parenting.
- Changes in daily routines (such as not getting enough sleep) however, can make the symptoms of ADHD worse.

## Care Advice

### 1. Overview: How to Help Your Child:

- ADHD is an ongoing condition. Medicine alone is not the answer.
- Your child also needs special kinds of help at home and school.
- For the poor attention span, encourage activities to help them learn to listen and complete tasks.
- For impulsive behavior, work on structure in your home and improving discipline. Teach self-control. It is a gradual process that can start when your child begins to walk.
- For hyperactive behavior, learn to channel it.

### 2. Accept Your Child's High Energy Level:

- Accept the fact that your child is active and energetic and possibly always will be. The hyperactivity is not intentional.
- Don't expect to stop the hyperactivity. Just try to bring it under control. Any attempt to change an energetic child into a quiet child will cause more harm than good.
- Nothing helps a hyperactive child more than having a noncritical, patient, low-key parent.

3. **Provide Outlets for Excess Energy:**
  - Daily outdoor activities such as running, sports, and long walks are good outlets for excess energy.
  - In bad weather your child needs a room where he can play as he pleases with minimal restrictions.
  - Toys need to be safe and sturdy.
  - Don't encourage hyperactive activities. Don't initiate roughhousing with your child. Avoid "chase me" and other running games in the house.
  - While it can be fun, it can become your child's main way of interacting with people.
4. **Set Up Daily Routines in Your Home:**
  - Structure helps the hyperactive child accept order.
  - Keep a regular schedule for wake-up, meals, snacks, chores, naps, and bed times as much as possible.
  - Try to keep your surroundings relatively quiet. Reason: quietness promotes thinking, listening, and reading at home. Leave the TV and radio off.
  - ADHD symptoms are made worse by lack of sleep and hunger. Be sure your child has an early bedtime, gets adequate sleep, and has a big breakfast.
5. **Maintain Firm Discipline and Clear Rules:**
  - Children with ADHD are often difficult to manage.
  - Hyperactive children tolerate fewer rules than the average child. Focus on a few clear, consistent, important rules. Add other rules at your child's pace.
  - Start with rules to prevent harm to your child and others. Aggressive behaviors such as biting, hitting, and pushing are not allowed.
  - Avoid repeated negative comments such as "Don't do that," and "Stop that."
  - Develop a hand signal rather than repeated spoken reminders to "slow down".
  - Avoid unneeded or extra rules, such as keeping his hands and feet still.
6. **Enforce Your Rules:**
  - When your child breaks a rule, correct them right away.
  - If words of disapproval don't work, give them a time-out. Without a time-out system, overall success is unlikely in younger children.
  - Try to use a friendly, matter-of-fact tone of voice when you discipline your child. If you yell, your child will be quick to do the same.
  - Don't use any physical punishment. We want to teach hyperactive children to be less aggressive and try to use words to express their emotions. Your child needs adult role models of consistency and calmness.
7. **Stretch Your Child's Attention Span While Growing Up:**
  - While the attention span may never be average, it can be improved. Better attention span and persistence with tasks can be taught at home. Don't wait. Start preparing your child for school.
  - Set aside several brief periods each day to read to your child. Reason: reading teaches listening skills. Start with picture books, and gradually progress to reading stories.
  - Encourage coloring books.
  - Matching pictures is an excellent way to build your child's memory.
  - Teach games, gradually increasing the difficulty. Start with building blocks and progress to puzzles, dominoes, card games, and dice games.
  - When your child becomes restless, stop and return to the game later.
  - Praise your child for paying attention.
  - All of these small steps toward better attention spans need a quiet environment. That means away from the sounds of television, radio and others talking.

**8. Protect Your Child's Self Esteem:**

- Don't let anyone in your family or neighborhood label your child as "a bad kid". Protect his self-image as a good kid with excess energy.
- Your child must always feel loved and accepted within your family. Never give up on him.
- As long as a child is loved and accepted at home, his positive self-esteem will survive.
- If your child has trouble doing well in school, help him gain a sense of success through a hobby in an area of strength.
- Finally, avoid taking your child places where high energy levels are less accepted (such as concerts or restaurants).

**9. From Time to Time, Get Away From It All:**

- Periodic breaks help parents better tolerate high energy behavior.
- Parents who work outside the home can try to take over when they come home. This also helps them better understand what the at home parent deals with during the day.
- A sitter some afternoons and an evening out can help an exhausted parent.
- Parents need a chance to renew themselves so that they can continue to meet their child's extra needs.

**10. Support the Special Education Team at School:**

- Preschool at age 3 is essential for children with ADHD. Reason: it provides structure and helps them get along better with other children.
- Once your child enters school, the school is responsible for providing appropriate programs for your child's ADHD and any learning disability they might have.
- Teachers have special techniques for helping children with ADHD.
- Many of these children also spend part of their day with special teachers who can help them improve their skills and confidence.
- If you think your child has ADHD and he has not been tested by the school's special education team, request an evaluation.
- Often you will get the help your child needs by working closely with the school staff through parent-teacher conferences and special meetings. Become part of their team.
- Your main job is to continue to help your child improve his attention span, self-discipline, and friendships at home.

**11. Stimulant Medicines Can be Helpful:**

- Stimulant medicines can improve a child's ability to concentrate. Stimulants are most effective if they are part of a broader treatment plan including special education and behavior management.
- If you and your child's teacher both feel that your child's short attention span is not responding to school services, discuss prescription medication with your child's doctor.
- In general, medicine is not recommended before school age.

## Call Your Doctor If

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- Your child shows continued aggressive behavior
- Your child has been suspended or expelled from school
- Your child can't make or keep friends
- You can't stop using physical punishment on your child
- You have other questions or concerns

### **Pediatric Care Advice**

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