

# ADHD should not stop me from reaching my dreams



Patient leaflet

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# INTRODUCTION

Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a complex neurobehavioural problem that affects 2 - 16 % of school-going children.<sup>1,2</sup> It is considered the most common psychiatric disorder in children and is known to persist into adulthood in 60 - 70 % of cases.<sup>2</sup> Males are more likely to be affected than females.<sup>3</sup> The essential feature of ADHD is a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with daily functioning or development.<sup>3</sup>

## What causes ADHD?

ADHD is inherited in most cases, which is why it tends to run in families.<sup>4</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that environmental insults that occur around pregnancy, such as alcohol use, smoking during pregnancy and low birth weight, may increase the risk of ADHD.<sup>4</sup>

## How is ADHD diagnosed?

An accurate diagnosis of ADHD is essential and should only be made by a specialist psychiatrist, paediatrician or other healthcare professional with training and expertise in the diagnosis of ADHD.<sup>2,4</sup>



ABC



*People say  
I misbehave and  
don't listen*

The diagnosis of ADHD is based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – 5th edition (DSM-5™) criteria:

### Symptoms<sup>3</sup>

- At least 6 symptoms in children or 5 symptoms in adults (≥ 17 y) of inattention and/or hyperactivity/impulsivity for at least

**6 months**

### Setting<sup>3</sup>

- Symptoms are present in two or more settings e.g. home, work, friends, family



### History<sup>3</sup>

- Several symptoms were present before the

**age of 12**



### Impairment<sup>3</sup>

- Social



- Academic



- Occupational



Adapted from DSM-5™<sup>3</sup>

## Symptoms of inattention (at least 6 needed):<sup>3</sup>

1. Makes careless mistakes
2. Difficulty sustaining attention
3. Doesn't listen
4. Instructions not followed through
5. Cannot organise
6. Avoids sustained mental effort (e.g. schoolwork or homework)
7. Loses important items
8. Distracted
9. Forgetful

# Symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsivity (at least 6 needed) <sup>3</sup>

- 1 Fidgets or squirms
- 2 Cannot stay seated
- 3 Runs/climbs excessively
- 4 Cannot work/play quietly
- 5 On the go
- 6 Talks excessively
- 7 Blurts out answers
- 8 Cannot wait turn
- 9 Interrupts others



## ADHD can cause substantial impairment at every stage of life <sup>2</sup>

Academic  
Limitations <sup>5</sup>

Low  
Self-esteem <sup>5</sup>



Childhood

Adolescents

Impaired Family  
and Peer  
Relationships <sup>5,6</sup>

Injuries <sup>6</sup>

Symptoms change as the child grows from childhood into adulthood.<sup>3</sup> The main symptom in preschool is hyperactivity, whereas inattention becomes more prominent in school-aged children.<sup>3</sup> During adolescence and adulthood, motor symptoms become less obvious but difficulties with restlessness, inattention, poor planning and impulsivity persist.<sup>3</sup>

Smoking and  
Substance Abuse<sup>2,5</sup>

Medical and  
Psychiatric  
Comorbidity<sup>2</sup>



Adolescents

Adulthood

Motor Vehicle  
Accidents<sup>2,6</sup>

Occupational  
Difficulties<sup>2</sup>



I can't focus

I feel different

I procrastinate



I GET OVERWHELMED

I CAN'T SIT STILL IN MEETINGS



Emotional

I'm impulsive!



I STRUGGLE TO REMEMBER THINGS

Time management is a challenge for me



## How is ADHD treated?

The aim of treatment is to alleviate symptoms and optimise cognitive, social and emotional functioning, allowing the affected individual to reach his/her full potential.<sup>2,4</sup> In children with mild to moderate ADHD, first-line treatment is a behavioural programme with or without medication.<sup>4</sup> In moderate to severe ADHD, first-line treatment is medication plus a behavioural programme.<sup>4</sup> In adults, however, behavioural treatment is less effective and medication is the cornerstone of management.<sup>2</sup>



The underlying problem in ADHD has been identified as an imbalance of two brain chemicals, i.e. dopamine and noradrenaline.<sup>1</sup> Medicines that improve ADHD act on these chemicals and are effective in 75 - 90 % of cases.<sup>1</sup>

**Stimulants** are by far the best studied and the most effective medication for ADHD across all age groups.<sup>2</sup> In addition to relieving the core symptoms of ADHD, stimulants improve associated features, such as academic performance and social functioning.<sup>2</sup> Methylphenidate is the stimulant of choice.<sup>2,4</sup> Long-lasting, extended-release formulations are preferred because they give more even efficacy and result in less troublesome side effects.<sup>4</sup> They also avoid the need for medication at school, which can be potentially embarrassing for the child.<sup>4</sup> In addition, a survey has shown that children with ADHD find the afternoon/evening period at least as difficult as the school day, which highlights the importance of a treatment that lasts the full day.<sup>7</sup>



## What are the typical side effects of stimulants?

Typical side effects (headache, reduced appetite, palpitations, nervousness, initial insomnia and dry mouth) are usually mild and transient.<sup>2</sup> Although there will always be concerns about the addictive potential of stimulants, studies have shown they actually reduce the risk of substance use disorder by 50 %.<sup>6</sup>

Children continue to grow while taking stimulants and any stunting in growth is reversible if the stimulant is discontinued during adolescence.<sup>6</sup> Doctors will routinely monitor growth and, if affected, may reduce the dosage of the stimulant and institute a 'drug holiday' so that catch-up growth can occur.<sup>4</sup>



**The non-stimulant atomoxetine,** is an appropriate alternative for people who experience intolerable side effects or have a contra-indication to stimulants.<sup>2,4</sup>



## Diet and supplements

Children and adults with ADHD should eat a well-balanced, nutritious diet and exercise regularly.<sup>8</sup> Supplementation with substances thought to be deficient (e.g. fatty acids) and elimination of substances thought to be harmful (e.g. artificial colourants and preservatives) is not routinely recommended.<sup>8</sup> Should a relationship between specific foods and behaviour become apparent, a professional should be consulted before embarking on an elimination diet.<sup>8</sup>

### Tips for parents:

- **Don't waste your time on self-blame:** ADHD is inherited in the majority of cases and is not caused by poor parenting<sup>9</sup>
- **Learn about ADHD:** look for accurate information and stick to reputable websites from non-profit organisations, governments or universities<sup>9</sup>
- **Make sure your child has a comprehensive assessment:** this should include medical, educational and psychological evaluations<sup>9</sup>
- **Join a support group:** check out the Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Support Group of Southern Africa at: <http://www.adhasa.co.za><sup>9</sup>

### Tips at home:

- **Provide clear expectations:** children with ADHD need to know exactly what is expected of them. Set limits and follow through with consequences<sup>9</sup>
- **Enforce discipline:** consistently reward appropriate behaviour and respond to misbehaviour with alternatives such as time-outs or loss of privileges<sup>9</sup>
- **Notice your child's success:** improve your child's self-esteem by telling him/her exactly what he/she did well rather than focusing on what went wrong<sup>9</sup>
- **Identify your child's strengths:** your child may be good at things like art, athletics or computers – encourage your child to build on these strengths<sup>9</sup>

Remember that children with ADHD are:<sup>10</sup>



### Curious

Not trying to be disruptive

### Creative

Regret their behaviour but are unable to stop

### Energetic

Often unaware of their disturbing behaviours

### Entertaining

Not mounting a personal attack on you



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in the interest of continuing  
ADHD education.



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