Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder
ADHD

Attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a problem with behavior issues based on the way the brain functions (*neurobehavioral disorder*). It is a common reason for behavior and academic problems in school.

CAUSES
The cause of ADHD is unknown in most cases. It may run in families. It sometimes can be associated with learning disabilities and other behavioral problems.

SYMPTOMS
There are three types of ADHD. Some of the symptoms include:

- Inattentive
  - Gets bored or distracted easily
  - Loses or forgets things. Forgets to hand in homework.
  - Has trouble organizing or completing tasks.
  - Difficulty staying on task.
  - An inability to organize daily tasks and school work.
  - Leaving projects, chores and homework unfinished.
  - Trouble paying attention or responding to details. Careless mistakes.
  - Difficulty following directions. Often seems like is not listening.
  - Dislikes activities that require sustained attention (like chores or homework).

- Hyperactive-impulsive
  - Feels like it is impossible to sit still or stay in a seat. Fidgeting with hands and feet.
  - Trouble waiting turn.
  - Talking too much or out of turn. Interruptive.
  - Speaks or acts impulsively
  - Aggressive, disruptive behavior
  - Constantly busy or on the go, noisy.

- Combined
  - Has symptoms of both of the above.

Often children with ADHD feel discouraged about themselves and with school. They often perform well below their abilities in school.

These symptoms can cause problems in home, school, and in relationships with peers. As children get older, the excess motor activities can calm down, but the problems with paying attention and staying organized persist. Most children do not outgrow ADHD but with good treatment can learn to cope with the symptoms.

DIAGNOSIS
When ADHD is suspected, the diagnosis should be made by professionals trained in ADHD.
Diagnosis will include:

- Ruling out other reasons for the child's behavior.
- The caregivers will check with the child's school and check their medical records.
- They will talk to teachers and parents.
- Behavior rating scales for the child will be filled out by those dealing with the child on a daily basis.

A diagnosis is made only after all information has been considered.

TREATMENT

Treatment usually includes behavioral treatment often along with medicines. It may include stimulant medicines. The stimulant medicines decrease impulsivity and hyperactivity and increase attention. Other medicines used include antidepressants and certain blood pressure medicines. Most experts agree that treatment for ADHD should address all aspects of the child's functioning. Treatment should not be limited to the use of medicines alone. Treatment should include structured classroom management. The parents must receive education to address rewarding good behavior, discipline and limit-setting. Tutoring and/or behavioral therapy should be available for the child.

If untreated, the disorder can have long term serious effects into adolescence and adulthood.

HOMECARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Often with ADHD there is a lot of frustration among the family in dealing with the illness. There is often blame and anger that is not warranted. This is a life long illness. There is no way to prevent ADHD. In many cases, because the problem affects the family as a whole, the entire family may need help. A therapist can help the family find better ways to handle the disruptive behaviors and promote change. If the child is young, most of the therapist's work is with the parents. Parents will learn techniques for coping with and improving their child's behavior. Sometimes only the child with the ADHD needs counseling. Your caregivers can help you make these decisions.

- Children with ADHD may need help in organizing. Here are some helpful tips:
  - Keep routines the same every day from wake-up time to bedtime. Schedule everything. This includes homework and playtime. This should include outdoor and indoor recreation. Keep the schedule on the refrigerator or a bulletin board where it is frequently seen. Mark schedule changes as far in advance as possible.
  - Have a place for everything and keep everything in its place. This includes clothing, backpacks, and school supplies.
  - Encourage writing down assignments and bringing home needed books.

- Offer your child a well-balanced diet. Breakfast is especially important for school performance. Children should avoid drinks with caffeine including:
  - Soft drinks.
  - Coffee.
  - Tea.
  - However, some older children (*adolescents*) may find these drinks helpful in improving their attention.

- Children with ADHD need consistent rules that they can understand and follow. If rules are followed, give small rewards. Children with ADHD often receive, and expect, criticism. Look for good behavior and praise it. Set realistic goals. Give clear instructions. Look for activities that can foster success and self-esteem. Make time for pleasant activities with your child. Give lots of affection.

- Parents are their children's greatest advocates. Learn as much as possible about ADHD. This helps you become a stronger and better advocate for your child. It also helps you educate your child's teachers and instructors if they feel inadequate in these areas. Parent support groups are often helpful. A national group with local chapters is called CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder).

PROGNOSIS

There is no cure for ADHD. Children with the disorder seldom outgrow it. Many find adaptive ways to accommodate the ADHD as they mature.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF YOUR CHILD HAS:

- Repeated muscle twitches, cough or speech outbursts.

- Sleep problems.
- Marked loss of appetite.
- Depression.
- New or worsening behavioral problems.
- Dizziness.
- Racing heart.
- Stomach pains.
- Headaches.

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