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*talks about*

## **Attention Deficit Disorder ADHD**

### **WHAT IS IT?**

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a commonly diagnosed behavioral disorder that has, at its core, developmentally inappropriate levels of attention, concentration, activity, distractibility and impulsivity. These difficulties affect a child across settings, including home, school and in peer relationships. More notably, attention deficit disorder can have long-term consequences for academic and vocational success as well as on psychological and social-emotional development.

### **HOW COMMON IS IT?**

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a disorder that is both over-diagnosed and under-diagnosed. While there are situations and other disorders that produce symptoms similar to ADHD leading to a misdiagnosis of the disorder, there are also many children who present with symptoms that are overlooked and explained away as "that's how kids are!" Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder has been found to affect 3-5% of all children. This would mean that there are somewhere between 1.5 and 2.5 million children in our schools nationwide that are struggling with ADHD. This number does not fully include children with other disorders, for example, learning disabilities, where ADHD co-occurs.

### **WHAT CAUSES ADHD?**

While a specific, single cause for ADHD has not been found, research has been able to identify a number of factors that result in ADHD. Heredity seems to be a significant contributing factor. When heredity is not an issue, other contributing factors that have been found include: difficulties during pregnancy, prenatal exposure to alcohol tobacco, or other substances, prematurity, low birth weight, high blood levels of lead, or postnatal brain injury. Also, in some instances, psychosocial stressors such as being bullied at school, abuse and/or neglect, divorce and other concerns can produce symptoms similar to ADHD.

Research so far does not support that ADHD results from excessive sugar intake, food additives, viewing of television, poor parenting, or other

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sociological factors such as poverty. There is research evidence that sleep difficulties and the presence of allergies can produce symptoms that mimic or exacerbate ADHD symptoms.

### **ARE THERE BRAIN DIFFERENCES IN CHILDREN WITH ADHD?**

The fronto-subcortical symptoms have been implicated in the presence of ADHD. There appears to be a disruption of the catecholamine system of the fronto-subcortical region.

### **WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

- Get an adequate evaluation. While there is no single test to diagnose ADHD, a comprehensive evaluation using a combination of tests can help to establish a diagnosis, to rule out other causes of ADHD-like symptoms and to determine the presence or absence of co-existing conditions.
- Consider the various treatment options including medication, behavioral strategies, skills training, and modifications in your child's school and social environments.
- Work closely with your child's primary care physician keeping him or her involved and informed about the diagnosis and proposed treatments.
- Educate yourself and your child about the diagnosis and what can be done to improve skills and abilities.
- Advocate for your child's rights. Know the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Acts. ([www.taalliance.org/centers](http://www.taalliance.org/centers).) When necessary, advocate for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 plan.
- Seek out support for yourself through professional support and parenting groups.
- Consider joining the advocacy organization CHADD.org.
- Educate yourself and "be wary" of alternative or complimentary treatments that are not scientifically proven.



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