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Understanding ADHD

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common childhood disorders. ADHD symptoms usually continue through teenage years and adulthood in some form. ADHD makes it hard for children to focus, pay attention or control their behavior.

ADHD has three subtypes:

1. **Inattentive subtype.** Signs include:
   - Becoming easily distracted by unimportant sights and sounds
   - Not paying attention to details and making careless mistakes
   - Not following instructions carefully and completely
   - Losing or forgetting things like toys, books and tools needed for a task

2. **Hyperactive-impulsive subtype.** Signs include:
   - Feeling restless, fidgeting and squirming
   - Running, climbing, leaving a seat when sitting or quiet behavior is expected
   - Blurt out answers before hearing the entire question
   - Having difficulty waiting in line or for a turn

3. **Combined subtype.** This is the most common of the three. It has parts of both hyperactivity/impulsivity and inattention.

It is important to get a correct diagnosis for ADHD. Symptoms of inattention might be seen as something else like shyness or disrespect for instructions. Symptoms of impulsivity might be labeled as bad behavior. On the other hand, symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity might be part of a different sort of problem like childhood depression, anxiety, learning disabilities or traumatic stress. The good news is there are treatments that can help once a child is diagnosed with ADHD.
What Causes ADHD?

Doctors aren’t sure what causes ADHD. Research says ADHD is not caused by eating too much sugar. Doctors do know that ADHD tends to run in families. It is more common in children who have parents or other family members with the disorder. ADHD is a disorder of brain function. This means that the brain has differences that cause difficulties in managing attention and behavior.

Signs of ADHD in Children

Most children start to show signs of ADHD when they are very young. But often the problems show up when they begin school. This is because they must follow more strict rules and pay attention in new ways. All children can have trouble paying attention and sitting still at times. But children with ADHD have more trouble than other children their age.

Children with ADHD may:

• Have a hard time focusing (paying attention)
• Not seem to listen or have trouble following directions
• Be easily distracted from schoolwork or play
• Forget or lose things
• Be in constant motion or unable to sit still
• Talk too much
• Not be able to play quietly
• Act and talk without thinking
• Not learn as easily from discipline

Diagnosing ADHD

If you think your child may have ADHD, talk with your child’s doctor. Only a doctor can say if your child has ADHD. There is no single test to determine if a child has ADHD. A doctor will compare your child’s behavior against very specific guidelines (rules) that doctors use to diagnose ADHD.

Many children with ADHD also have at least one other illness or condition. They may have trouble learning. They may also find it hard to control their behavior or feelings. The most common conditions that are found in children with ADHD are:

• Disruptive behavior disorders
• Mood disorders (like depression)
• Anxiety disorders
• Twitching of body parts, eye blinking, shouting out (tic disorder or Tourette’s Syndrome)
• Learning disabilities
Treating and Getting Help for ADHD

If your doctor says your child has ADHD, there are treatments that can help.

Behavior Therapy

Behavior therapy can help improve your child’s relationships with others and performance at school. This includes teaching new skills to change behavior, like:

- Creating a routine
- Using goals and rewards
- Limiting choices
- Avoiding distractions
- Helping your child discover a talent
- Getting organized

Behavior therapy is recommended as the first form of treatment for pre-school aged children (4–5 years). Parents or teachers can provide this treatment.

Medication

Medication can be a valuable part of your child’s treatment. It may help control some of the problem behaviors with family, friends and at school.
ADHD Medicine is Safe

The most common type of medicine that your child’s doctor will prescribe to treat ADHD is called a stimulant. Although these drugs are called stimulants, they actually have a calming effect on people with ADHD. This is because the part of the brain that controls focus and helps people control their behavior is underactive and needs to be stimulated in order to do its job.

Know that stimulant medicines are safe and effective when they are used under a doctor’s supervision.

Stimulants do not make children with ADHD feel high, although some say they feel a little different or “funny.” Some parents think their child seems less like the child’s normal self when they are taking their medicine. This can take getting used to. Some children eat less when they take ADHD medicines. Parents must adjust feeding times around medicine doses. Your child’s doctor may try a couple of different medicines or dosages before finding what works best for your child.

To help your child with his or her ADHD medicine, you should:

- Keep an eye on your child while he or she is taking ADHD medicine. Tell the doctor if the medicine is working or if you have concerns about the medicine.
- Share any changes in your child’s behavior with your child’s doctor.
- Be sure your child follows the doctor’s instructions on how often and how much medicine to take.
- Keep up with all of your child’s appointments for ADHD medicine checkups.

There is not one treatment that will help every child with ADHD. In most cases, ADHD is best treated with a behavior therapy and medication used together. Treatment is a partnership between you, your child and your child’s doctor. Children with ADHD also need to see their doctor often to make sure treatment is working.

Talk with your child’s doctor about the recommendations for ADHD treatment and about what’s best for your child.
Communication With Your Child’s Doctor is Key

After your child is diagnosed with ADHD, it’s very important to take your child to the follow up appointment within a month. This helps you and the doctor see how things are going and deal with any problems or concerns. Added doctor visits may be needed until the doctor feels that your child is doing well with the treatment prescribed. If your child is prescribed medication, follow up visits are required in order to get medicine refills.

Will My Child Always Need Medicine?

If your child has been prescribed medicine to treat his ADHD, you may wonder when your child can stop taking the ADHD medicine. Many children diagnosed with ADHD will continue to have problems with one or more symptoms later in life. In these cases, ADHD medicine can be taken into adulthood to help control symptoms. When symptoms are milder to start with, the symptoms of ADHD decrease over time as brains naturally mature. Children also learn ways to make up for their symptoms, like organizational methods. Be sure to talk to your child’s doctor first if you have questions about stopping ADHD medicine.
Consequences of Not Treating

Not getting the right treatment for your child’s ADHD can cause harm to his or her health and social life. Your child may fall behind in school or have disciplinary problems. Your child may also experience troubles with friendships and at home. Untreated ADHD can cause frustration between parents and children.

Studies show that children with untreated ADHD have more emergency room visits and are more likely to have general accidents and self-inflicted injuries than those treated for the disorder. Untreated adolescents with ADHD are more likely to take risks, like drinking and driving. And they have twice as many motor vehicle accidents as those who are treated.
Myths About ADHD

It is NOT true that ADHD is caused by poor parenting. You should not blame yourself or your parenting skills if your child has been diagnosed with ADHD. Know that positive parenting can help manage symptoms of ADHD. You can create a home setting with clear expectations and a regular schedule. On the other hand, a home setting that is chaotic can make symptoms of ADHD worse.

Only children can have ADHD. In most cases, children do not outgrow ADHD. Many people are actually not diagnosed until they are an adult. For some adults, a diagnosis is made after their own child is diagnosed. As these adults learn more and more about ADHD, they often recognize ADHD traits in themselves.

Stimulant medicines lead to drug abuse and addictions. Research has actually found the opposite result. There is a higher risk of drug abuse if symptoms of ADHD are not treated. Problems like depression grow from untreated ADHD, and drugs or alcohol are sometimes used to help relieve the ADHD symptoms.

Children also perform poorly in school and often turn to delinquent peers and activities, which can include drug use. The rate of drug abuse is much lower when the correct treatment is used. Treatment often does include stimulant medicines.

Medicine can cure ADHD. Medicines do not cure ADHD. But they help to control symptoms of ADHD on the day they are taken. ADHD is a lasting condition that does not go away. But symptoms may change or lower over time. Children with ADHD can develop ways to help manage and control symptoms over their lifetime. They may continue to need treatment through medicines to help control their symptoms into adulthood.
ADHD and School

Children with ADHD need the right help at school. Most children with ADHD are not in special education classes. Talk to your child’s teacher about ADHD and what kind of help your child needs.

Be sure to talk to your child’s teacher often about how your child is doing. There are many ways at home – and school – to help your child manage ADHD.

Tips for success at school
- Use a folder for notes between you and the teacher
- Make sure homework directions are short and clear
- Praise your child for good behavior or doing well in school
- Ask the school counselor or psychologist for help
- Structure and supervise homework routines

Transitions can be difficult
Children with ADHD need routine and structure. But every new school year brings a new teacher and new schoolwork. So this change can be especially hard. Tell your child’s teachers that your child has ADHD when he or she starts school or moves to a new class. This extra support will help your child deal with the transition.

Kids with ADHD are eligible for special services or accommodations at school under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) and an anti-discrimination law known as Section 504. Reach out to school officials at your child’s school for more information.
Tips for Parents

Parenting a child with ADHD can bring special challenges. Children with ADHD may not respond well to typical parenting practices. Because we know that ADHD tends to run in families, parents may also have some problems with organization and consistency themselves. Parents may need to seek help with these skills too. Experts recommend parent education and support groups to help the child, parents and other family members. These resources may be able to help children with:

- Organizing their environment
- Developing problem-solving skills
- Coping with frustrations

Training can also teach parents to respond appropriately to a child’s most difficult behaviors with calm disciplining techniques. Individual or family counseling can also be helpful.

Resources for Parents:

ADDitude
View and download free handouts about ADHD by visiting http://www.additudemag.com/resources/printables.html.

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
For the AACAP Resource Center visit http://www.aacap.org/cs/ADHD.ResourceCenter.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Visit http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/diagnosis.html to find the “Tips and Resources for Parents” section.

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
For excellent tips and resources like support groups and parent training classes visit http://www.chadd.org/Support/Tips-and-Resources.aspx. This website is a favorite for caregivers who need ADHD education and tips.

National Resource Center on ADHD
Call 1-800-233-4050 or visit http://www.help4adhd.org/info_request.cfm to submit an information request.

Tennessee Voices for Children
http://www.tnvoices.org/. This statewide resource is free to Tennessee parents and offers parent-to-parent support, help in figuring out the educational system and how to advocate for your child in the school, support groups, and online and printed resources for parents and teens

Have a question about ADHD? Want to know more? BlueCare and TennCareSelect members can call Nurseline at 1-800-262-2873. Members can get answers to health questions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
Sources:

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
http://www.aacap.org/cs/ADHD.ResourceCenter/adhd_faqs

KidsHealth

National Institute of Mental Health

National Resource Center of ADHD

U.S. Department of Education
http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html

U.S. Food and Drug Administration
http://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm269188.htm
We do not allow unfair treatment in TennCare™.
- No one is treated in a different way because of race, color, birthplace, religion, language, sex, age, or disability.
- Do you think you’ve been treated unfairly?
- Do you have more questions or need more help?
- If you think you’ve been treated unfairly, call the Tennessee Health Connection for free at 1-855-259-0701.

If you have a hearing or speech problem, you can call us on a TTY/TDD machine. Our TTY number is 711 and ask for 888-418-0008.

Do you have a mental illness and need help with this information? The TennCare Advocacy Program can help you. Call them for free at 1-800-758-1638.

¿Habla español y necesita ayuda con esta carta?
- Llámenos gratis al BlueCare 1-800-468-9698.
- Llámenos gratis al TennCareSelect 1-800-263-5479.

Need help in another language?
- You can call TennCareSelect for assistance in any language at 1-800-263-5479 or the numbers below.
- You can call BlueCare for language assistance at 1-800-468-9698 or the numbers below.

Interpretation and translation services are free to TennCare members.

Foreign Language Lines
call if you need help and need to speak with someone in one of these languages:

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<th>Language</th>
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<tr>
<td>العربية (Arabic)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bosanski (Bosnian)</td>
<td>1-800-758-1638</td>
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<td>کوردی - پادینانی (Kurdish-Badinani)</td>
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