Parent’s Guide to ADHD
Helping take care of you and your child
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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
   - Blurting 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 medicines and 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 or watching too much TV. 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 medicines and treatments that can help.

There is not one treatment that will help every child with ADHD. The best treatment usually includes medicine and teaching children how to manage their behavior. 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.

You and your child can also learn ways to manage ADHD symptoms. You can learn how to help your child:
• Be organized
• Develop problem-solving skills
• Deal with frustration
• Develop skills for better performance
• Have better behavior

Talk with your child’s doctor about all the choices and ways to treat ADHD.
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.
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 on the medicine prescribed. Follow up visits are required in order to get medicine refills.

Will my child always need medicine?

You may wonder when your child can stop taking 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:

**Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)**
For excellent on-line 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.

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

**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.

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

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:
National Institute of Mental Health,

National Resource Center on ADHD,

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

KidsHealth,
http://kidshealth.org/parent/medical/learning/adhd.html#

U.S. Department of Education,
http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html
Habla español y necesita ayuda con esta carta? Llámenos gratis al BlueCare 1-800-468-9698. Llámenos gratis al TennCareSelect 1-800-263-5479.

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 Family Assistance Service Center for free at 1-866-311-4287. In Nashville, call 743-2000.

If you have a hearing or speech problem you can call us on a TTY/TDD machine. Our TTY/TDD number is 1-800-226-1958.

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

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Need a ride to the doctor? Call the Customer Service. BlueCare members call 1-800-468-9698. TennCareSelect members call 1-800-263-5479. Please call at least 3 days before your checkup to guarantee your ride.