

## ADHD

### WHAT IS IT?

You open the door to your child's room and wonder how you missed the tornado warning sign posted outside. His or her grades are falling and completing homework takes as long as deciding the 2000 presidential election. All of these behavioral changes are turning your life inside out.

A friend suggests ADHD as the possible culprit. But what is ADHD? ADHD is an acronym for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. According to the American Psychiatric Association, ADHD is defined as a "persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity or impulsivity that is more frequent and severe than is typically observed in individuals at a comparable level of development."

Many children are not diagnosed until after they start school. Children with ADHD find it hard to sit still for extended periods and tend to fidget, daydream, and "tune out" instead of focusing and listening. They often float from activity to activity without paying specific attention to anything and are more likely to misplace personal belongings. They are hyperactive and distracted, and routinely procrastinate. They can also be inattentive, and disorganized without being hyperactive.

### Making a Diagnosis

Children will be children and thus every child exhibits some of these behaviors at one time or another. To constitute ADHD, a child's symptoms must be frequent or more severe than in other children of the same age. The symptoms must affect the child's daily functions; persist for an extended period; and occur in two or more settings—such as home and in school.

ADHD is challenging to diagnose because symptoms do not show up during conventional health exams and furthermore, some physical and psychological problems imitate the symptoms of people with ADHD.

ADHD is known to coexist with other conditions such as learning disabilities, aggression, disruptive behavior, depression, or anxiety disorders. As many as one-third of children diagnosed with ADHD have coexisting conditions.

Diagnosing ADHD is something of a collaborative effort since parents, teachers, and caregivers usually observe the first symptoms. They may notice academic underachievement and failure, disruptive behavior, carelessness, problems with establishing and/or maintaining social relationships, and poor self-esteem.

If you are concerned that your child is showing some of the symptoms associated with ADHD, talk to your physician. Early recognition, assessment and management of this condition can redirect the educational and psychosocial development of most children with ADHD.

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