



# Sunny Days

Psychotherapy . Counselling . Assessment

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## A helpful guide for Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

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### What is attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)?

ADHD is characterized by developmentally inappropriate levels of inattention, impulsivity, and overactivity. There are three different types of ADHD, depending on which types of symptoms are strongest in the individual:

- **Predominantly Inattentive Presentation:** it is difficult for the individual to keep things organized, to finish a task, to pay attention to details, or to follow instructions or conversations; the person is easily distracted or forgets details of daily routines.
- **Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation:** it is difficult for the individual to sit still for long (i.e. while doing homework or eating), wait their turn or listen to directions; the person fidgets and talks a lot, feels restless and has trouble with impulsivity; smaller children may run, jump or climb constantly; impulsive individuals may interrupt others a lot, grab things from people, or speak at inappropriate times.
- **Combined Presentation:** symptoms of the above two types are equally present.

ADHD is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood; it is usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood. ADHD occurs in 3 to 5% of elementary-school aged children and is more common in males than females.

In addition to the problems with inattention, impulsivity, and overactivity, individuals with ADHD often have academic or employment problems and difficulties in social interactions. ADHD often co-occurs with problems such as depression or anxiety, oppositional defiant or conduct disorder, and learning disabilities.



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## What are the causes of ADHD?

ADHD is very likely caused by biological factors which influence neurotransmitter activity in certain parts of the brain, and which have a strong genetic basis. However, the specific cause of the disorder is not known, and it is likely that multiple causes or contributing factors exist.

ADHD is not caused by poor parenting, family problems, poor teachers or schools, too much television, food allergies, or excess sugar. One early theory was that attention disorders were caused by minor head injuries or damage to the brain, and thus for many years ADHD was called “minimal brain damage” or “minimal brain dysfunction”. However, the vast majority of people with ADHD have no history or evidence of head injury or brain damage.

There is a great deal of evidence that ADHD runs in families, which is suggestive of genetic factors. If one person in a family is diagnosed with ADHD, there is a 25% to 35% probability that any other family member also has ADHD, compared to a 4% to 6% probability for someone in the general population.

## What is the difference between ADD and ADHD?

The difference is mainly one of terminology, which can be confusing at times. Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (known as ADHD) is the official, clinical term used in diagnoses (regardless of whether hyperactive symptoms are present). ADD is a now-outdated term that refers to the predominantly inattentive presentation of ADHD.

## How is ADHD diagnosed?

Deciding if an individual has ADHD is a several step process. There is no single test to diagnose ADHD, and many other problems, like anxiety, depression, and certain types of learning disabilities, can have similar symptoms. One step of the process involves arranging a medical exam, including hearing and vision tests, to rule out other problems with symptoms like ADHD. A full psychoeducational assessment is conducted with children and teenagers to look at their cognitive, academic, and social-emotional functioning. During this process a structured clinical interview with the parent and child/teen is conducted to identify current areas of difficulty within home and school settings. Behaviour ratings and checklists are completed by the parent, child/teen and the teacher. For adults, it is imperative to look at ADHD-like symptoms retrospectively between the ages 5 to 12.

## What treatments are used to treat ADHD?

The most effective treatment for ADHD is a combination of medication (when necessary), therapy or counselling to learn coping skills and adaptive behaviours, and ADHD coaching for adults.



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Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is often helpful to modify certain behaviours and to deal with the emotional and social effects of ADHD. Many children and adults learn to manage problem behaviours and develop coping skills, such as improving organizational skills and improving productivity.

Medication is often used to help normalize brain activity and must be prescribed by a physician.

## How can I help?

### *For children with ADHD*

In order to make sure your child reaches his or her full potential, it is very important to get help for ADHD as early as possible. I will first meet with the parent(s)/guardian(s) by taking a complete history of their child's problems at home, school and during social activities. Then, I will meet with your child to get a sense of what he or she is like. After my evaluation, I will create a list of target behaviours for treatment. Target behaviours are ones that need to be changed so the child gets better. They can be either behaviours that need to stop or new skills that need to be learned. During sessions, I may work on the following: teach social skills (how to get along with others); help to solve social problems; decrease unwanted behaviours (i.e. bossiness, not sharing). The treatment changes as the child changes.

### *For adults with ADHD*

Adults who suffer from ADHD know that it can have harmful effects in their work, in their self-esteem, and in the way they interact with their family and friends. I provide my clients with practical and effective skills that have been scientifically tested and shown to help adults cope with their ADHD symptoms. These symptoms include difficulty focusing, being easily distracted, difficulties with organization and planning, and impulsivity. I use evidence-based **Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** to train you to:

- Think adaptively, enabling you to increase your awareness of negative thoughts
- Develop strategies for keeping your thoughts in check
- Minimize symptoms
- Use adaptive thinking skills for managing procrastination

I will also help you to implement coping solutions, such as using a daily planner, starting to work on tasks well in advance of their deadline, and breaking large tasks into smaller tasks. While the coping solutions may seem simple, they can be difficult to implement. Facing these longstanding challenges may also trigger negative thoughts, pessimism, self-criticism, and feelings of frustration that create additional barriers to follow through.



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## Myths and Facts about ADHD

Myth	Fact
ADHD is not a real disorder.	“ADHD is a chronic disorder that has a negative impact on virtually every aspect of daily social, emotional, academic, and work functioning”, says Dr. Russell A. Barkley, author of Taking Charge of Adult ADHD (Guilford Press, 2010). A large-scale study has shown differences in brain structure between children with and without ADHD ( <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(17)30049-4">https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(17)30049-4</a> ).
ADHD medications are dangerous and addictive.	Every medication has the potential for side effects, including those for ADHD. Stimulant medications, including methylphenidate (Concerta, Focalin XR) and amphetamines (Vyvanse, Adderall XR) are the most frequently prescribed drugs for ADHD. Dr. Goodman, assistant professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, states that these medications, at the right doses, provide a calming and focusing effect on people with ADHD. The newer time-released formulations are less likely to be abused because of the way your body processes them. Overall, research has found stimulant medications to be effective and safe. “Over 80 percent of people with ADHD will respond to the first or second stimulant they try”, says Dr. Goodman.
Children outgrow ADHD.	Approximately 70% of children with ADHD continue to have symptoms during their teen years, and approximately 50% have symptoms into adulthood. If left untreated, adult ADHD can generate low self-esteem, anxiety, employment problems, forgetfulness, substance abuse, depression and relationship problems.
ADHD is caused by poor parenting. All the child needs is good discipline.	ADHD is not caused by anything parents do, although symptoms can be exacerbated by a negative and chaotic home atmosphere. Through programs like Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, parents can learn effective techniques for helping children rein in disruptive behaviours and increase positive ones.
Unless you have been diagnosed with ADHD as a child, you can't have it as an adult.	ADHD often goes unrecognized or undiagnosed throughout childhood. In adults, hyperactivity may decrease, but they may continue to struggle with organization, impulsiveness, restlessness, and difficulty paying attention.