

Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

What are ADHD and ADD?

ADHD and ADD are behavioural disorders characterised by problems paying attention for a length of time and/or being unable to remain engaged in one activity — especially as is typical for any given age group. Both are often categorised as childhood disorders because they commonly manifest or are diagnosed during the early years of childhood development, mainly during the early school-going years (ages 5–8 years old). It is far less common to be diagnosed with ADHD or ADD in adulthood. However, it can occur, and either disorder may have as much of a detrimental effect in adults as they would in childhood.

What are the common signs of ADHD or ADD?

It is important to recognise that the two most common signs of these disorders — inattention and hyperactivity — may also exist as characteristics of typical children and adults. However, it is their noteworthy impact on everyday routines, such as at work, school, and even leisure activities, which becomes a cause for concern.

Inattention

The symptom of inattention comprises an inability to pay attention for a sustained period of time, including trouble getting organised, an inability to listen directly in conversations or a tendency to seem expressly dreamy at times. Additionally, the individual may have trouble staying focused on schoolwork or finishing assigned tasks. The tasks can take various forms of things that are regularly left undone or unfinished, even chores at home. Frequently, it is how easily the person becomes distracted during a task that lends itself to the task being unfinished.

Hyperactivity

The symptom of hyperactivity is characterised by the individual feeling overly restless, which is often accompanied by fidgeting or tapping of hands and/or feet, sometimes uncontrollably, and being noisy. The individual is also likely to be impulsive, which might manifest in a difficulty to wait his or her turn to speak, a tendency to say inappropriate things, the inability to adapt to changing situations, and a propensity to act without thinking.

What to do if you suspect ADD or ADHD?

Find a psychologist

A qualified mental health professional is needed to make a complete review of the individual's behavioral issues. Like depression, ADHD is a symptoms-based mental disorder. It is important to note that the symptoms may likewise occur in a number of other psychological disorders or medical conditions. Furthermore, excessive drinking or drug use (whether legal or illegal) may also cause some of the signs mentioned here. A psychological assessment is therefore the best course of action. It is best to seek help from a psychologist registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). A full battery of tests may require some time, but it's best not to guess or to wait.

Treatment

It is also important to first seek psychological services to come up with a treatment plan, although medication can be prescribed by a medical doctor. Mental health clinicians have the tools to improve both diagnoses and treatment. According to the American Psychological Association, medication for treating ADHD or ADD, particularly the stimulant medication Ritalin or Adderall, is more effective when combined with counselling from a trained professional.

Sources

American Psychiatric Association (2013) *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (5th edition). Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.

American Psychological Association (2016): <http://www.apa.org/topics/adhd>.