

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in Adults: GP Guide

Adult Symptoms

- Carelessness & lack of attention to detail
- Starts new tasks before finishing old ones
- Poor organisational skills
- Inability to focus, or prioritise
- Continually losing, or misplacing things
- Forgetfulness
- Restlessness & edginess
- Difficulty keeping quiet, & speaking out of turn
- Blurting responses, & poor social timing when talking to others
- Often interrupting others
- Mood swings
- Irritability & a quick temper
- Inability to deal with stress
- Extreme impatience
- Taking risks in activities, often with little, or no, regard for personal safety, or the safety of others

What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

While everybody to some extent occasionally has trouble sitting still, paying attention, or controlling impulsive behaviour, others may experience impulsivity, hyperactivity or internal restlessness, and inattention at such high levels that their daily lives are disrupted to a disabling extent.

Undiagnosed ADHD in adults may have severe consequences such as academic failure, substance abuse, criminal activity, failed relationships, troubled work relationships, and emotional difficulties such as anxiety and depression.

How common is ADHD in adults?

Recent studies show that 15% of children with ADHD retain the full diagnosis by age 25, whilst for 65% enough symptoms associated with clinical impairment persist. Applying these figures to the prevalence range commonly seen in children of 4–8%, one would expect to find 0.6–1.2% of adults retaining the full diagnosis by age 25 years and a larger percentage (2–4%) with ADHD in partial remission. This is consistent with population surveys in adult populations that estimate prevalence of ADHD in adults to be between 3 and 4% (Faraone & Biederman, 2005; Kessler et al., 2006).

In adult life, the male-female ratio for ADHD appears to be approximately equal, which suggests that the high gender ratios favouring boys in childhood may be a result of under-identifying the problem in girls, or that girls may present with different symptoms.

How is ADHD diagnosed in adults?

Only psychiatrists experienced in the field of ADHD can make a formal diagnosis. If medication is needed, then after dose stabilisation, prescribing and monitoring should be carried out under locally agreed shared care. The diagnosis is made based upon an assessment of the person's needs as well as coexisting conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dyspraxia. The assessment will also include social, familial, educational or occupational circumstances, a physical health exam, as well as full clinical and psychosocial assessment.

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