

# What's the Difference Between ADHD and ADD?

Medically reviewed by [Timothy J. Legg, PhD, CRNP](#) on April 12, 2017 — Written by Tricia Kinman

[Types](#) [Inattention](#) [Hyperactivity and impulsivity](#) [Other symptoms](#)  
[Adult ADHD](#) [Severity](#) [Takeaway](#) [Q&A](#)

## Overview

[Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#) is one of the most common childhood disorders. ADHD is a broad term, and the condition can vary from person to person. There are an estimated 6.4 million diagnosed children in the United States, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

This condition is sometimes called attention deficit disorder (ADD), but this is an outdated term. The term was once used to refer to someone who had trouble focusing but was not hyperactive. The American Psychiatric Association released the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) in May 2013. The DSM-5 changed the criteria to diagnose someone with ADHD.

Keep reading to learn more about the types and symptoms of ADHD.

ADVERTISEMENT



READ NEXT →

ADVERTISEMENT



# Types of ADHD

There are three types of ADHD:

## 1. Inattentive

Inattentive ADHD is what's usually meant when someone uses the term ADD. This means a person shows enough symptoms of inattention (or easy distractibility) but isn't hyperactive or impulsive.

## 2. Hyperactive/impulsive

This type occurs when a person has symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsivity but not inattention.

## 3. Combined

Combined ADHD is when a person has symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

## Inattention

Inattention, or trouble focusing, is one symptom of ADHD. A doctor may diagnose a child as inattentive if the child:

- is easily distracted
- is forgetful, even in daily activities
- is unable to give close attention to details in school work or other activities and makes careless mistakes
- has trouble keeping attention on tasks or activities
- ignores a speaker, even when spoken to directly
- doesn't follow instructions
- fails to finish schoolwork or chores



READ NEXT →

ADVERTISEMENT



- dislikes and avoids tasks that require long periods of mental effort, such as homework
- loses vital things needed for tasks and activities

ADVERTISEMENT

## Hyperactivity and impulsivity

A doctor may diagnose a child as hyperactive or impulsive if the child:

- appears to be always on the go
- talks excessively
- has severe difficulty waiting for their turn
- squirms in their seat, taps their hands or feet, or fidgets
- gets up from a seat when expected to remain seated
- runs around or climbs in inappropriate situations
- is unable to quietly play or take part in leisure activities
- blurts out an answer before someone finishes asking a question
- intrudes on and interrupts others constantly

[Learn more: 7 Signs of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\) »](#)



READ NEXT →

ADVERTISEMENT



criteria to be diagnosed with ADHD:

- displays several symptoms before the age of 12
- has symptoms in more than one setting, such as school, at home, with friends, or during other activities
- shows clear evidence that the symptoms interfere with their functioning at school, work, or in social situations
- has symptoms that are not explained by another condition, such as [mood](#) or [anxiety disorders](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

## Adult ADHD

Adults with ADHD have typically had the disorder since childhood, but it may not be diagnosed until later in life. An evaluation usually occurs at the prompting of a peer, family member, or co-worker who observes problems at work or in relationships.

Adults can have any of the three subtypes of ADHD. Adult ADHD symptoms can differ from those of children because of the relative maturity of adults, as well as physical differences between adults and children.

[Learn more: 12 Signs of adult ADHD »](#)



READ NEXT →

ADVERTISEMENT



# Get Answers from a Doctor in Minutes, Anytime

Have medical questions? Connect with a board-certified, experienced doctor online or by phone. Pediatricians and other specialists available 24/7.

ASK A DOCTOR NOW

## Severity

The symptoms of ADHD can range from mild to severe, depending on a person's unique physiology and environment. Some people are mildly inattentive or hyperactive when they perform a task they don't enjoy, but they have the ability to focus on tasks they like. Others may experience more severe symptoms. These can affect school, work, and social situations.

Symptoms are often more severe in unstructured group situations than in structured situations with rewards. For example, a playground is a more unstructured group situation. A classroom may represent a structured and rewards-based environment.

Other conditions, such as [depression](#), anxiety, or a learning disability may worsen symptoms.

Some people report that symptoms go away with age. An adult with ADHD who was hyperactive as a child may find that they're now able to remain seated or curb some impulsivity.

ADVERTISEMENT



READ NEXT →

ADVERTISEMENT



## Takeaway

Determining your type of ADHD puts you one step closer to finding the right treatment. Be sure to discuss all your symptoms with your doctor so you get an accurate diagnosis.

## Q&A

**Q:**

Can a child “outgrow” ADHD or will it continue into adulthood if left untreated?

**A:**

Current thinking suggests that as the child grows, the prefrontal cortex grows and matures as well. This decreases symptoms. It's been suggested that roughly one-third of people no longer have symptoms of ADHD during adulthood. Others may continue to have symptoms, but these may be milder than those noted during childhood and adolescence.

– Timothy J. Legg, PhD, CRNP

Answers represent the opinions of our medical experts. All content is strictly informational and should not be considered medical advice.

## Article resources



READ NEXT →

ADVERTISEMENT



**READ THIS NEXT**

## Symptoms and Signs of Adult ADHD

ADD/ADHD affects about 5 percent of children, and more than half carry their symptoms into adulthood. Many adults have ADD/ADHD without ever being...

[READ MORE](#)

## Misdiagnosis: Conditions That Mimic ADHD

Many medical conditions in children have symptoms that mirror those of ADHD, which can make a correct diagnosis difficult. Here are alternative...

[READ MORE](#)

## 6 Natural Remedies for ADHD

ADHD is regularly combatted with medication, but natural treatments such as biofeedback, massage, and supplements may be better options.

[READ MORE](#)[READ NEXT →](#)

ADVERTISEMENT



## Disorder (ADHD)

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, is generally diagnosed in children by the time they're teenagers, with the average age of diagnosis...

[READ MORE](#)

## Asperger's or ADHD? Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Treatments

Both Asperger's and ADHD are conditions which may be diagnosed early in life, and they may share certain symptoms which may appear similar. But there...

[READ MORE](#)

## Is It Bipolar Disorder or ADHD? Learn the Signs

Bipolar disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are conditions that affect many people. Learn the differences between the two and...

[READ MORE](#)



[READ NEXT](#) →

ADVERTISEMENT



While ADHD can create its own set of behavioral challenges, having the condition has reported to be an advantage to some. Here's how to make it work...

[READ MORE](#)

## The Four Greatest Myths About ADHD

People with ADHD are often misunderstood by others unfamiliar with the condition. We'll lay to rest four common myths associated with ADHD.

[READ MORE](#)

## Signs and Symptoms of ADHD in Toddlers

It can be difficult to interpret whether your toddler has ADHD. Learn about the subtle signs and treatment options.

[READ MORE](#)

## Everything You Need to Know About ADHD

Everything you need to know about ADHD, including how to diagnose it, how to treat it, and how to live with it.



[READ NEXT](#) →

ADVERTISEMENT



[READ MORE](#)

## Get our wellness newsletter

Fitness and nutrition tips, health news, and more.

Enter your email

**SUBSCRIBE**

Your privacy is important to us



[About Us](#)

[Health News](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Advertising Policy](#)

[Careers](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[Health Topics](#)

[FDA](#)

[Advertise With Us](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Find an Online Doctor](#)

Copyright © 2005 - 2019 Healthline Media. All rights reserved. Our content does not constitute a medical consultation. See a certified medical professional for diagnosis. [Privacy Policy](#).

ADVERTISEMENT

