

ADHD

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers



What is ADHD?

'Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder' (ADHD) is a condition characterised by differences in the way the brain works. These differences may include fluctuating levels of concentration, restlessness and fidgeting, impulsiveness, being easily distracted, and difficulty regulating emotions. People with ADHD experience significant difficulties with executive function skills—these are the skills that help you get things done, like planning, working memory, prioritizing and controlling your attention.

Despite the name, ADHD is less about a *deficit* of attention and more about difficulty *regulating* attention: a person with ADHD may find it very hard to concentrate on something that isn't mentally engaging, but also very hard to stop concentrating on something that has captured their attention.

There are also many strengths that can come from having ADHD, such as creativity, conversational skills, spontaneity and energy. Hyperfocus can be a powerful tool too, and bring a lot of joy, although it has some potential pitfalls as well.

ADHD is common, affecting around 2 to 5 per cent of school-age children, with more boys than girls currently receiving a diagnosis. This may be because ADHD can present differently with girls and is harder to recognise. ADHD is a life-long condition. For some people, the way their ADHD affects them may change in adulthood and they may experience new strengths or challenges as a result.

Characteristics of ADHD

People with ADHD display one or both of these main characteristics:

Inattentiveness – signs include: having trouble concentrating on things that aren't mentally rewarding, being easily distracted; difficulty switching tasks when focused; appearing forgetful or losing things; finding it difficult to listen or follow instructions; constantly changing activity.

Hyperactivity and impulsiveness – signs include: being unable to sit still or to concentrate on tasks; moving or talking a lot or very fast; interrupting; changing topics quickly; acting without thinking; racing thoughts; having little or no sense of danger.

The criteria that lead to a diagnosis of ADHD are usually noticeable in children before the age of six and will be seen in more than one setting (such as home and school). Some people with ADHD also have learning difficulties and problems with sleep. ADHD is also common amongst autistic people.

People who only have difficulties with inattention used to be diagnosed with 'attention deficit disorder' (ADD), now known as the inattentive part of ADHD. Those who primarily experience this aspect may go longer without their difficulties being noticed, as their symptoms may be less obvious.

Causes of ADHD

The exact causes of ADHD are not known. It tends to run in families and research suggests that parents and siblings of a child with ADHD are four to five times more likely to have the condition themselves. Various other risk factors are thought to play a part in ADHD but firm links have not been made, so more research is needed.





Types of therapy

There is no known 'cure' for ADHD but there are a number of therapies and interventions that can help to manage it, including:

- **ADHD coach** – an ADHD coach can work with your child or young person to help them identify their strengths, and develop skills they may be struggling with— like organization, time management or social skills—in a way that works *with* their ADHD, not fighting against it.
- **Medication** – a number of drugs are available for ADHD which may help make day to day life easier. Five drugs are licensed in the UK – methylphenidate, dexamfetamine, lisdexamfetamine, atomoxetine and guanfacine.
- **Social life-skills** – using role play and drama to help children and young people understand more about their social differences, and learn strategies for interacting in specific social situations. They can also learn how to communicate their needs to others and ask for any support or changes they need. This can help alleviate social anxiety and rejection sensitivity, which many people with ADHD experience.
- **Diet and exercise** – the NHS recommends regular exercise and a balanced diet for children, young people and adults with ADHD. Speak to your GP or a dietician with expertise around ADHD for advice on dietary changes that might help with symptoms.
- **Talking therapies** – regular contact with a counsellor, psychologist, ADHD coach or psychotherapist is known to help children better understand and manage their condition.

Ask about

- **ADHD Aware** - regular online Zoom support groups for parent carers of children and young people with ADHD. Also runs a peer support group for adults with ADHD that meets monthly in Brighton and online. Visit: <https://adhdaware.org.uk>
- **ADHD support group** - informal support group for adults affected by ADHD or autism. At the Y in St Leonards on Sea. See <https://www.ycentrehastings.org.uk/portfolio/items/adhd-support-group>
- **Amaze – NDP Family Training and Navigation Service** - provides support at each stage along the neurodevelopmental pathway from when a condition has been flagged or your child has been referred for assessment, through to diagnosis (or no diagnosis) and after. The pathway and conditions covered by the service vary slightly for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove, but ADHD is covered in both areas. Visit our website for more info: <https://amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/services-and-support/ndp-family-training-and-navigation/>
- **Amaze - SENDIASS** offers impartial, confidential advice on anything to do with special educational needs and disability (SEND) for 0 to 25 year olds. Parents, carers, children and young people under 25 with SEND living in Brighton & Hove or East Sussex can use the service. Email sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk, call 01273 772289 or visit our website at <https://amazesussex.org.uk>
- **Amaze - Face 2 Face befriending and support groups.** Face 2 Face gives families in Sussex one-to-one emotional support around the time of their child's diagnosis or new challenges. We also run regular in-person groups for parent carers to meet other parent carers with similar life experiences. We have groups for parent carers of a child of any age with any disability, as well as groups specifically for dads/male carers, for parents of 16-25s, a multicultural support group, autism groups and groups for families getting support from our NDP Family Training and Navigation Service. See our website for more info: <https://amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/services-and-support/face-2-face-befriending/>





- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)** – this NHS specialist mental health service can diagnose, assess and support children and young people with ADHD. You need to be referred to this service. Speak to your GP or child's school, or contact the Brighton & Hove Wellbeing Service (www.brightonandhovewellbeing.org) or East Sussex Single Point of Advice (sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/east-sussex-spoa).

Further reading and useful links

- **ADHD Foundation** - information and resources on ADHD. Visit: www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/resources
- **Additude** - a wealth of resources about ADHD, including a section for parents. This is an American website, so be aware that some information may not be relevant to UK families. Visit: www.additudemag.com
- **Local Offer** – the local authority's online listing of all the services and support that are available to families with children with SEND in the area. Visit brighton-hove.gov.uk/localoffer
- **Young Minds** – the mental health charity for young people has a section of their website devoted to ADHD with fact sheets and advice, including a guide for parents. Visit: www.youngminds.org.uk.

