

## ADD in Adults



### What is ADD?

Attention deficit disorder, also commonly referred to as ADD, is a **group of symptoms that affect concentration** and a person's ability to focus. It can also cause mood swings and other social problems.

### How Does ADD Manifest in Adults?

Those experiencing **adult ADD ADHD symptoms** may find it hard to follow directions, remember information, concentrate, organize tasks, or complete work within time limits. If these difficulties are not managed appropriately, they can cause associated **behavioral, social, emotional, vocational, and academic problems**.

There is a differentiation made between children with ADD and adults with the disorder. Although teens fall into the adult category (ages 12 and up), they may deal with some issues that are localized to this group.

For instance, teens with attention deficit disorder have **difficulty in completing their school work** and are often in trouble with parents and teachers.

### The Difference Between ADD and ADHD

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is the umbrella disorder, encompassing three sub-groups. These three groups are defined as follows:

- **ADD Inattentive Type**

Teens and adults with this disorder are not overly active. They **do not disrupt** the classroom/office, so their symptoms might not be noticed. Their main difficulty is the **inability to focus and concentrate**. In teen girls, this sub-group of ADD is the most common.

- **ADD Hyperactive/Impulsive Type**

In this sub-group of ADD, rarely adults exhibit only hyperactivity/impulsivity symptoms. This is classified as ADHD, as it includes the element of **hyperactivity**.

- **ADD Combined Type**

Teens and adults with this type of ADD show **hyperactive behavior** (starting in childhood), **impulsive behavior**, and **cannot focus or concentrate**. Hyperactivity symptoms tend to be less noticeable in adults. This is classified as ADHD as it includes the element of hyperactivity, and is the **most common form of ADHD**.

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# Diagnosing ADD in Adults

The diagnostic principles used for ADD in adults (including teens) are similar to those used in diagnosing children with ADD.

To begin, it is important to establish whether adult ADD ADHD symptoms **were present during the individual's childhood**, even if they were not previously recognized. These **symptoms should be observed in multiple settings** such as home, school, work, etc.

Because adults can provide their own history, input, and insight, it can make the process of **seeking a diagnosis much easier** than in the case of children with ADD. Adults are able to more clearly vocalize what they are experiencing, and **put into words the chaos they often feel inside**. In addition, because the disease is now more understood, there are alternative solutions for ADD and ADHD that can make receiving the diagnosis more manageable.

## Steps in Making the ADD Diagnosis

The process of diagnosing attention deficit disorder **must be comprehensive**. It requires several steps, and involves gathering a multitude of information from various sources. It is important to recognize that under no circumstances should ADD be diagnosed in any adult whose primary diagnosis is an emotional disorder, such as anxiety or depression.

**A licensed health care professional or psychologist should:**

- **Investigate the following areas:**
  - School history and school reports (looking for specific problems beginning as early as possible that may have been encountered during development)
  - Sibling relationships
  - Family history (for any occurrence of ADD)
  - Eating habits
  - Sleep patterns
  - Medical problems (physical problems, particularly allergies)
- Determine how the individual handles different situations through observation activities.
- Perform a physical examination. A full medical history will be needed to put the behavior in context and screen for other conditions that may affect it. The health care professional will also want to talk to the individual about their feelings and 'typical' actions during the course of a routine day.
- Investigate if other areas are a possible root cause of the behavior. If this is determined to be the case, the diagnosis of ADD must be put on hold until these areas are fully explored. These include:
  - Mental retardation
  - Chronic illness being treated with a medication that may interfere with learning
  - Trouble seeing and/or hearing
  - History of abuse



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**Michele Carelse, Clinical  
Psychologist**



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

- Major anxiety or major depression
  - Severe aggression
  - Possible seizure disorder
  - Alcohol or drug abuse
- Request personal information about the individual's life at home, behavior in college/work, and in other social settings. The health care professional may inquire about existing symptoms, duration, and the affects of the behavior. Other signs or symptoms may be identified at this time and warrant a blood test, brain imaging study, or an EEG. Blood or other laboratory tests are currently recommended only if the health care professional suspects lead toxicity or other medical problems.

## Recognizing the Symptoms of ADD

The main symptom of attention deficit disorder in adults is difficulty with the brain activity responsible for **monitoring a person's own behavior**. This causes one of the biggest problems adults with ADD face, which is developing a sense of self-regulation.

This lack of self-control affects an adult's ability not just to do tasks, but also in determining when they need to be done. This can be extremely frustrating to the ADD adult.

Adult ADD does not have clear physical signs that can be seen in an X-ray or show up on a lab test. **Adult ADD ADHD symptoms can only be identified** by looking for certain characteristic behaviors (which vary from person to person) and by examining the individual's history.

The ways in which the following characteristics of adult ADD affect each individual will be different and unique, and may include:

### Inattention and Memory Difficulties

- May be forgetful in daily activities
- May consistently begin a task and not complete it
- May have a problem following conversations
- May be difficult to motivate yourself to begin a project
- May have difficulty following a timed schedule
- May be in constant movement
- May get bored easily
- May become restless after a few minutes of inactivity
- May have a great desire for active, risky, and fast-paced activities

### School-Related Impairments

- A history of poor educational performance, thus a strong likelihood of underachievement
- Frequent school disciplinary actions
- May have repeated a grade
- May have dropped out of school

### Work-Related Impairments

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- May show a frequent change in employers and perform at less than optimal levels
- May have had fewer occupational achievements, independent of psychiatric status

### Social-Related Impairments

- Have a lower socioeconomic status
- Have driving violations such as: speeding tickets, suspended license, car accidents, and/or record of poor driving
- Use illegal substances more frequently
- Smoke cigarettes
- Self-report psychological maladjustment more often

### Relationship-Related Impairments

- Have more marital problems and multiple marriages
- Have higher incidence of separation and divorce

Remember that every individual is unique, and just because you may have been diagnosed with ADD does not mean you will automatically experience or exhibit these behaviors.

There are several symptoms for ADD that seem to worsen when demands at school, college, work, or home increase. They are:

- Not listening to instructions
- Inability to get organized
- Fidgeting, especially with the hands and feet
- Talking too much
- Failure to finish projects, including work assignments
- Difficulty paying attention to and responding to details

Although adults with ADD (including teens) are more likely to recognize these symptoms than children with ADD, it is still very important to seek a thorough evaluation and professional diagnosis regardless of age.

### What Causes ADD in Adults?

One of the first questions you may have is "Why is this affecting me? What went wrong?" or even "Did I do something to cause this?"

When correctly diagnosed, there is **little evidence that ADD can arise purely from social factors or environment**. Knowing this can remove a huge burden of guilt from family members or partners who might blame themselves for the individual's behavior.

Researchers suspect that there are **several factors that may contribute to the condition**, including:

- **Heredity and genetics:** The fact that ADD tends to run in families suggests that children may inherit a genetic tendency to develop an attention-deficit disorder from their parents.

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- **Chemical imbalance:** People who have ADD may not be able to produce enough chemicals in key areas of the brain that are responsible for organizing thought.
- **Brain changes:** Areas of the brain that control attention are less active in adults with ADD than in people without the disorder.

## Myths Surrounding the Causes of ADD

Although the following factors may present symptoms similar to those of ADD, research has shown that there is **no evidence that ADD is caused by the following:**

- Immunizations
- Too much TV
- Poor home life
- Poor schools or colleges
- Bad parenting
- Aspartame (or sugar substitutes)
- Lack of vitamins
- Fluorescent lights
- Video games

However, in some cases, the above factors **could certainly cause symptoms similar** to those seen in ADD in certain individuals.

## Help for Adults with ADD

ADD is often treated using conventional prescription medications. While there is a place for prescription medication in certain cases of ADD, **careful consideration should be taken** regarding possible side effects and cautions.

There are also **alternative solutions for ADD and ADHD** available. Making simple changes in diet, sleep, exercise, and routine can help. Even trying more involved approaches like **incorporating relaxation therapies** such as guided imagery, meditation techniques, or yoga can be beneficial.

There are also many **herbal and homeopathic remedies** which can help maintain harmony, health, and systemic balance in the brain and nervous system, without side effects or sedation. These products are **known for their supportive function** in maintaining brain, nervous system and circulatory health, and well-being.

## Prescriptions Drugs and their Side Effects

The most commonly used stimulants for the treatment of ADD include Ritalin, Adderall and Concerta. The non-stimulant drug Strattera has also been widely prescribed as treatment for ADD.

While there is a place for prescription medication in certain cases of ADD, careful consideration should be taken regarding possible side effects and cautions.

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**Contact your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions or concerns about using these medications.**

There are some difficulties in using stimulants to treat ADD in teens and adults. Stimulants are controlled substances and it is not uncommon for adults or teens with ADD to have or to have had problems with substance abuse.

Short-acting stimulants may wear off quickly, and since adult patients administer the medication themselves but usually have problems with forgetfulness, **consistency can be problematic** with multiple-day dosing.

Adults may experience significant difficulty in the evening when they do housework, pay bills, help children with homework, or drive. They may be tempted to use substances 'to relax', which can lead to **addiction and drug-dependency**. Teens may sell their medication to friends, or combine it with other substances.

### **Long-Term Complications**

Research into the long-term effects of Ritalin and other drugs prescribed for ADD is still in its early stages, and must be continued.

Discuss with your doctor the risks and benefits of using these medications or treating your teen with these medications.

It is strongly advised that the following criteria are fully investigated with regards to any stimulant drugs: common uses, cautions, possible side effects, overdose, additional information, and major drug interactions.

*The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are still investigating certain side effects of certain prescription ADD drugs, and it is advisable that individuals do their own research into these medications so that they are fully aware of the potential risks.*

## **Managing ADD in Adults and Teens**

[Alternative solutions for ADD and ADHD](#) including being proactive and taking initiative to find the best possible treatment plan. Be positive. Here are a few tips.

Tips for you as an ADD Adult:

- Set aside a few minutes each night to schedule the following day's events
- Organize needed everyday items so you know where things are
- Use diaries and notebook organizers
- Don't be too hard on yourself or set unrealistic goals

### **Activities to Pursue:**

While there is no single activity that guarantees teens with ADD instant success, certain types of activities tend to reap more positive results.

- Look for activities with a singular focus, such as sports that center attention
- Consider activities that involve movement, providing an appropriate and



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- controlled physical outlet
- Learn to play a musical instrument
- Seek activities that offer individualized instruction
- Explore activities that result in tangible rewards

### **Activities to Avoid:**

- Those that involve a lot of down time
- Those that require too much divided attention
- Those that require fine motor skills

### **Special Advice for Managing Teens with ADD**

Tips for you as a parent to help your ADD teen:

- Maintain as much routine and consistency as possible
- Try to avoid major or frequent changes
- Ensure that family relationships are stable
- Be very consistent in your discipline and keep all rules the same
- Speak often to your teen's teachers
- Engage in activities that promote concentration and listening skills
- Use frequent eye contact when speaking to your teen or giving instructions
- Keep directions simple and set simple house rules
- Provide a structured outlet for hyperactivity
- Teach using as many of the senses as possible and make learning interactive
- Review your expectations for your teen
- Reward positive behavior immediately
- Anticipate situations
- Make sure your teen is supervised at all times
- Learn and understand the symptoms of ADD
- Schedule tasks and reminders
- Organize needed everyday items
- Use homework and notebook organizers
- Set a homework routine
- Focus on effort, not grades
- Make a special effort to highlight positives in your child

### **Try not to:**

- Use physical punishment
- Put too many expectations on your teen
- Focus too much on the areas your teen is struggling with

### **Conditions Often Accompanying Adult ADD**

One of the difficulties in diagnosing adults with attention deficit disorder is that it is often accompanied by other problems.

A number of disorders may mimic or accompany ADD. Many experts believe the term ADD should be used to describe a collective group of symptoms and behavioral problems. Many of these problems require other methods of treatment and should be diagnosed separately, even if they accompany ADD.

Because emotional disorders and attention disorders so often go hand-in-hand,

every teen exhibiting ADD symptoms should be checked for accompanying anxiety and depression.

## Conditions Commonly Coexisting with ADD

ADD may coexist with one or more disorders. The most common disorders to occur in an adult with ADD are:

- **Disruptive behavior disorders**
- **Tics and Tourette's Syndrome**
- **Learning disabilities**

Of course, not all adults with ADD have an additional disorder. Nor do all people with learning disabilities, Tourette's syndrome, oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder have ADD. But when they do occur together, the combination of problems can seriously complicate a person's life.

- **Learning Disabilities.** Many teens with ADD also have a specific learning disability (LD). Reading, writing difficulties, or arithmetic disorders may appear. Dyslexia, a type of reading disorder, is quite widespread.
- **Tourette's Syndrome.** A very small proportion of people with ADD have a neurological disorder called Tourette's syndrome. People with Tourette's syndrome have various nervous tics and repetitive mannerisms, such as eye blinks, facial twitches, or grimacing. They may also experience sudden verbal or behavioral outbursts or even problems with anger management. Psycho-stimulant ADD drug treatment may exacerbate the symptoms of Tourette's Syndrome and some believe it may even precipitate the disorder.
- **Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD).** It is important to note that any teenager, whether or not they are suffering from ADD, will at times feel frustrated and misunderstood. Their behavior could easily be seen as defiant, confrontational, and disrespectful, which may present itself as ODD. Similarly, asserting his or her independence is a normal stage in any teen's transition into young adulthood. Once again, correct evaluation is essential.
- **Conduct Disorder (CD).** Conduct disorder (CD) is sometimes seen as a more serious pattern of antisocial behavior. Similarly, as with ODD, it is important to note that most teens will 'act out' occasionally. A teenager who has emotional problems may destroy property, steal, and lie – all of which can be misdiagnosed as CD.
- **Anxiety, Mood Disorders, and Depression.** Anyone diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, mood disorder, bipolar disorder, depression, or any other emotional disorder as the principal diagnosis may not be diagnosed with ADD. Emotional disorders must be treated separately.
- **Sleep Disorders.** Sleep disorders or disturbances are very common in ADD individuals, which can lead to the age old 'chicken or the egg' question... "Am I struggling to sleep because of the ADD, or am I suffering with ADD symptoms due to lack of sleep?" Ironically, many stimulant drugs used to treat ADD list sleep problems as a possible side effect to the prescribed medication.

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools and most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also sometimes called orthodox medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that, only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is ‘better’ than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned on by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed by conventional doctors and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the body has an innate capacity to heal itself. While natural medicines are often called ‘alternative’ or ‘complimentary’ medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term ‘holistic’ medicine is more apt, given the broad range of treatment options and approaches which are to be found within the practice of natural medicine, which encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a holistic way to support health, relieve symptoms and prevent future disease. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "... more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to support health (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer and that, in many cases, holistic medicine can accomplish just as much, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs. Contrary to common perception, and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way, natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing.

In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical

evidence to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that, like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic medicines must be manufactured in the correct way, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While ‘standardized’ extracts may offer benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper more efficient production lines), they have grave disadvantages. These include an increase in side effects as the medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction – which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.

Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life threatening condition, don’t make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will support patients who want to take responsibility for their own health.

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