

ADHD in Adults:

4 Things to Know

From the **NATIONAL INSTITUTE of MENTAL HEALTH**

1 Adults can have ADHD.

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is marked by a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity that makes it hard to function in at least two areas of life, such as at home, school, or work.

Adults with ADHD may experience the following types of symptoms:

- ▶ **Inattention:** Difficulty paying attention, staying on task, or being organized
- ▶ **Hyperactivity:** Excessive activity or restlessness, even at inappropriate times, and difficulty engaging in quiet activities
- ▶ **Impulsivity:** Acting without thinking or having trouble with self-control

Based on their symptoms, a person can be diagnosed with one of three types of ADHD: inattentive, hyperactive-impulsive, or combined.

Adults with ADHD often have a history of poor academic performance, work problems, or strained relationships. They may find it challenging to stay organized, stick to a job, keep appointments, perform daily tasks, or complete large projects. They may be restless, try to do multiple things at once, or engage in risky or impulsive behaviors.

ADHD is considered a developmental disorder because symptoms must begin in childhood—but many adults also have ADHD.

2 ADHD symptoms can cause problems in daily life.

ADHD symptoms interfere with daily functioning. In adults, symptoms can lead to:

- ▶ Difficulty paying attention and often getting distracted
- ▶ Disorganization and procrastination
- ▶ Poor time management, planning, or organization
- ▶ Trouble remembering daily tasks
- ▶ Frequently losing things or being forgetful in activities
- ▶ Frequently interrupting others or being very talkative
- ▶ Trouble focusing on a large task or multitasking
- ▶ Trouble following instructions or finishing projects
- ▶ Difficulty sitting still for long periods and often moving or fidgeting
- ▶ Feelings of restlessness and a need for constant activity or stimulation
- ▶ Choosing immediate rewards over future rewards or consequences

Many people show some of these behaviors some of the time. However, for adults with ADHD, they are more severe, frequent, and persistent, interfering with daily life, occurring across multiple situations, and lasting at least 6 months.

ADHD often co-occurs with other mental disorders and can make them harder to treat. Sleep problems are especially prevalent, affecting up to 70% of adults with ADHD.

Symptoms continue into adulthood for many people with ADHD, but they may change with age. For instance, inattentive symptoms often persist as people get older, whereas hyperactivity and impulsivity are more likely to decline. Learn more about symptoms and types of ADHD at www.nimh.nih.gov/ADHD.

3 ADHD is diagnosed differently in children and adults.

ADHD can be diagnosed in childhood or adulthood. However, adults must have shown symptoms much earlier, starting before age 12.

The main difference between diagnosing ADHD in children and adults is the number of symptoms. Adults or adolescents over 16 years must show five (instead of six) symptoms of inattention or hyperactivity and impulsivity.

How can a provider know if I showed ADHD symptoms as a child?

Diagnosing ADHD in adulthood is complicated by the need to show symptoms before age 12. For this reason, a diagnosis relies heavily on past reports of behavior.

To help diagnose ADHD, a primary care provider or mental health professional may ask to talk to people who know you well, such as a partner, family members, and friends, to learn about your behavior in different situations and during childhood. They may look at school reports or other childhood records.

A provider will also talk to you and may ask you to do the following:

- ▶ Complete clinical interviews, behavior rating scales, or symptom checklists to determine whether you meet the criteria for a diagnosis of ADHD.
- ▶ Take psychological tests that look at cognitive processes, such as memory, planning, decision-making, reasoning, and thinking, to identify strengths and challenges and possible learning disabilities.
- ▶ Report on your mood and current and past medical conditions to rule out alternative diagnoses and establish an overall treatment plan.

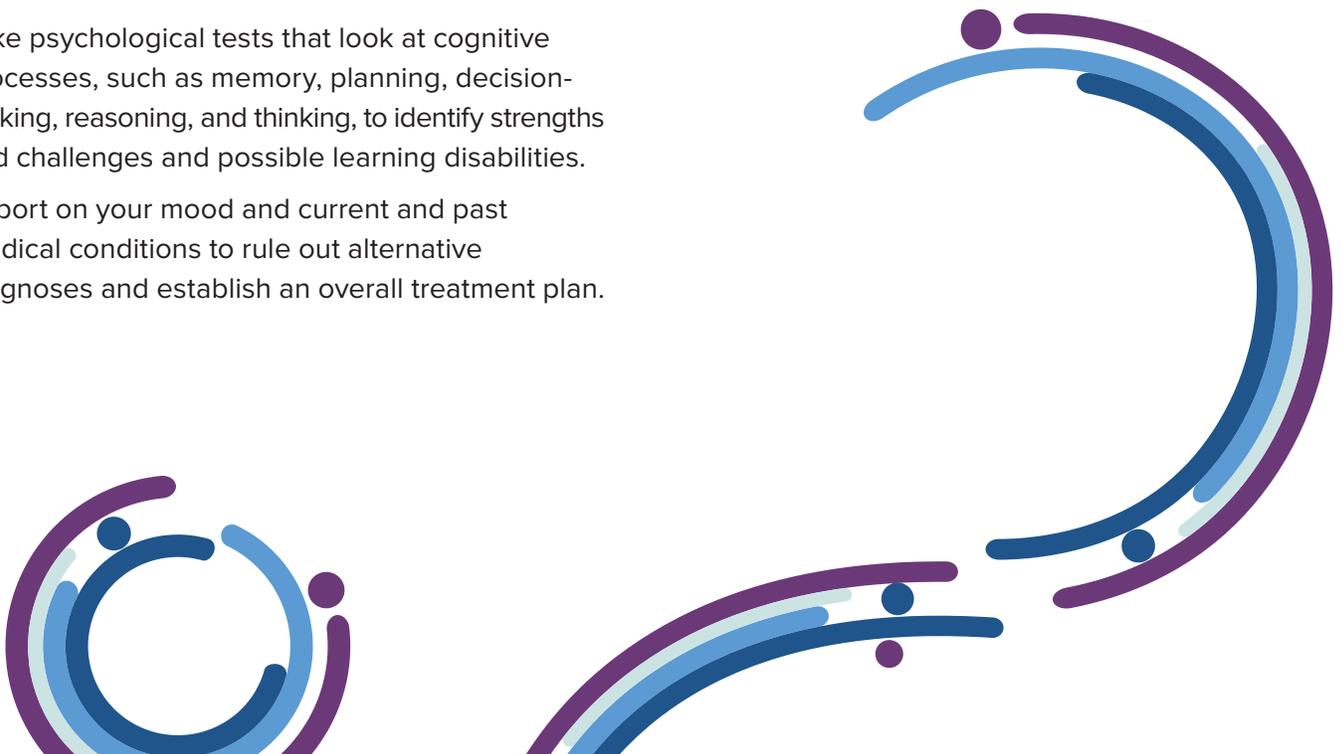
Why wasn't I diagnosed with ADHD earlier?

There are many reasons someone may not be diagnosed with ADHD until adulthood. For instance, your teachers and parents may not have recognized the disorder or may have provided supportive environments that helped you thrive despite it. Or you may have a milder form of ADHD that could be managed well until faced with the stresses and demands of adulthood, especially at work.

ADHD symptoms among girls and women are especially likely to have been missed in childhood. Sex differences in diagnosis rates begin to even out in adulthood.

It is never too late to seek a diagnosis and treatment for ADHD and any other mental health condition that may occur with it. Effective treatment can make day-to-day life easier for many adults and their families. Find tips for talking with a health care provider at www.nimh.nih.gov/talkingtips.

You can learn more about getting help at www.nimh.nih.gov/findhelp. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides information about finding support at <https://findsupport.gov> and locating mental health services in your area at <https://findtreatment.gov>.



4 Treatment is available for adults with ADHD.

Treatment for ADHD can reduce symptoms and improve functioning. The most common treatments for ADHD in adults are:

- ▶ Medication, usually stimulant medications
- ▶ Psychotherapy, like behavioral and cognitive behavioral therapy

Effective treatment often involves a combination of elements. Sometimes, people must try several treatments before finding the one that works for them.

NIMH has information on stimulants and other mental health medications at www.nimh.nih.gov/medications. You can learn about psychotherapy, including what to look for in a therapist and how to find one, at www.nimh.nih.gov/psychotherapies.

Some adults may find it helpful to get support from a life coach or ADHD coach who can teach them executive function skills to improve daily functioning. Others try lifestyle changes, like adding more physical exercise to their daily schedule.

People whose ADHD symptoms cause impairment at work may qualify for reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). You can learn more about the ADA at www.ada.gov.

Find additional resources

The following organizations have more information on ADHD:

- ▶ **Attention Deficit Disorder Association:**
Offers an array of resources to find help, including virtual support groups and a professional directory, at <https://add.org>
- ▶ **Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder:**
Hosts a National Resource Center with information, links, and resources at <https://chadd.org/nrc>
- ▶ **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**
Provides information and resources on ADHD symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment options at www.cdc.gov/adhd

Note: This resource list is for informational purposes only. It is not comprehensive, and an organization's inclusion does not constitute an endorsement by NIMH.

What are clinical trials and why are they important?

Clinical trials are research studies that look at ways to prevent, detect, or treat diseases and conditions.

These studies help show whether a treatment is safe and effective in people. Some people join clinical trials to help doctors and researchers learn more about a disease and improve health care.

Other people, such as those with health conditions, join to try treatments that aren't widely available.

NIMH supports clinical trials across the United States. Talk to a health care provider about clinical trials and whether one is right for you. For more information, visit www.nimh.nih.gov/clinicaltrials.



For more information

Learn more at www.nimh.nih.gov/health. For information about various health topics, visit the National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus resource at <https://medlineplus.gov>.

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