

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Getting a diagnosis of ADHD

You may have waited some time to confirm whether you have ADHD, or it may have come as something of a surprise. Whatever your situation, you may find that your reaction to the diagnosis is complicated.

What is ADHD?

It is not an illness but a neurodevelopmental condition which means that it is something that you are born with due to a variation in the way your brain functions. Its cause is not exactly known but it can run in families.



The condition can vary significantly. Some people have only symptoms of inattention, whilst others have more of hyperactivity and impulsiveness. As such, there are three types of ADHD: the inattentive, the hyperactive/impulsive, and the combined types.

Typical features include:

Inattentive ADHD

- Having trouble remembering things and losing things
- Making careless mistakes and being disorganised
- Having trouble getting started on things or completing them
- Difficulty concentrating, listening, or following instructions

Hyperactive / impulsive ADHD

- Being fidgety and overactive
- Excessive levels of energy; a need to keep busy, acting as if 'driven by a motor'
- Talking a lot, interrupting others and / or intruding on others' activities
- Impatience, an inability to wait, difficulty with turn-taking
- Acting without thinking and taking risks

Many people also have problems with sleeping, getting going in the morning, irritability and anger, and getting bored easily. Risky, impulsive behaviour can lead to contact with the police, whilst others turn to caffeine, drink or drugs to try to "self-medicate" and slow down.

ADHD is a lifelong condition that begins in childhood. Adults can struggle because demands and responsibilities increase with age, and the support and structure they receive from others as children naturally decrease.

It is common for the hyperactive symptoms to lessen in adulthood, but issues with concentration and impulsiveness can remain.

Having ADHD does not mean that you are “mad” or “bad” in any way, just different.

Finding out you have ADHD

This may be alarming, a big relief, or it may come as no surprise to you. You may always have felt there was something “different” about you, and this explains it. After a while though, you may find your reactions to the diagnosis vary.

Understanding your own difficulties after a diagnosis can take a long time. Although you have not changed, there has been a major change in your perspective. It can seem that everything has to be re-evaluated.

People often go through these stages:

- Relief and elation
- Confusion and turmoil
- Anger
- Sadness and grief
- Anxiety
- And finally – accommodation and acceptance

What next?

It is important to learn about ADHD yourself first and your own ADHD. You do not need to tell everyone and there is no rush.

Explaining your diagnosis to others

This can be vital in getting the support and understanding that you need, but you may be worried about others' reactions. You may like to show people this leaflet, or you can ask the psychologist to give you a letter for work or college to explain it. Consider identifying your 'inner circle' of people (e.g., partners, close family members) and telling them first. You may then wish to inform your 'outer circle' (e.g., friends, colleagues), provided you feel comfortable doing so.

Behavioural strategies

Understanding ADHD, acting compassionately towards yourself and making changes to way you plan and organise yourself can help. Once you have been diagnosed, we offer a one-off strategy session with an Assistant Psychologist as well as a 6-week psychoeducation and support group with the psychology team. If you are interested in these options, please see the separate information sheet about opting in for post-diagnostic support.

Medication

This is not an appropriate or suitable option for everyone. It is important to consider the impact of ADHD on your life and your wider health. If appropriate, an appointment will be made for you to discuss this further.

