



ADD WELLNESS GROUP • INTENSIVE TREATMENT PROGRAM • AUTISM SPECTRUM SERVICES • ASSESSMENT CENTER

WHAT IS ADHD?

With our busy lives, it seems as if we all might have Attention Deficit Hyperactively Disorder, or ADHD. It is hard to know what are just normal work demands and home responsibilities, versus what is a clinical condition. We are just beginning to understand the complexities of how our brains think and learn.

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental, biological condition characterized by three hallmark symptoms:

- Inattention
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity

These symptoms must be present by age 7 in order for someone to have a true diagnosis of ADHD.

What does ADHD look like?

ADHD can affect every aspect of life:

- School
- Peer Relationships
- Self-esteem
- Work
- Family Relationships
- Personal Safety

Symptoms will vary greatly from person to person and not all are necessarily present, but can be used as general guidelines. Some symptoms often include:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Distractibility
- Frequently losing things
- Procrastination
- Restlessness or fidgetiness
- Impulsiveness
- Forgetfulness
- Inattention to details
- Trouble completing tasks
- Daydreaming
- Problems with organization or planning

What Causes ADHD?

ADHD runs in families as it is highly heritable; almost as heritable as height. Although we know that genetics play an important role in ADHD, the exact mechanism is unknown. Research has shown chemical differences in the brain can lead to ADHD type symptoms. Most treatment interventions for ADHD including medication, nutrition, counseling and behavioral therapies are geared toward focusing the busy mind and re-regulating these brain molecules.

Are We Over-diagnosing ADHD?

There is public concern that ADHD is over-diagnosed. Unfortunately, studies show ADHD is still under-diagnosed and many people are not getting the help they need. ADHD affects approximately 7-8% of school aged children (over 4 million children) and 4-5% of adults (over 8 million adults) but there are still many who are not aware they have ADHD. The diagnosis is more frequently missed in girls because they have more inattentive, day-dreamy symptoms and are less like to have hyperactive, behavioral issues a teacher or parent may recognize sooner.

It is important to work closely with an ADHD professional since many other conditions can cause ADHD-like symptoms when it's not really ADHD. To make the picture more complicated, sometimes other conditions can even co-occur with ADHD, such as:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Learning Disorders
- Tics
- Sleep Disorders
- Problems with organization or planning
- Substance use/abuse

What ADHD is NOT

ADHD is not a childhood condition that you grow out of. It is not a disorder caused by poor parenting or simply psychosocial stress in families. Frequently, parents and couples put unnecessary blame themselves or each other. ADHD is a well-recognized medical condition. It is the most common neurobehavioral disorder in childhood, and 40-60% of ADHD children will continue to have symptoms into adulthood.

Diagnosis

There is no single objective test for ADHD. If someone is suspected of having ADHD, a comprehensive evaluation is recommended to make an accurate diagnosis. Steps should include a thorough medical and psychological history, a review of school records, as well as getting collaborative information from a parent or spouse. Objective measures are also an important part of the assessment. Objective measures should include ADHD rating scales, which are checklists of ADHD behaviors that the client fills out independently and Neuropsychological testing administered by a professional.

Knowing that 20-25% of people with ADHD have a coexisting learning disability, we strongly recommend neuropsychological testing to further assess the client's learning style and specific needs. Neuropsychological testing is an essential component for a student seeking school supports.