ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

ADHD in adulthood

ADHD affects how the brain manages attention, activity and impulses. It starts in childhood, but many people are only recognised as adults – often women, and those whose symptoms were put down to anxiety or low mood.

What is it?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition that often runs in families. It is not caused by bad parenting or lack of effort. Symptoms start before age 12 and affect more than one part of life. In adults, hyperactivity often feels like restlessness inside.

What you might notice

- Losing focus in conversations, meetings or reading, even when you try hard
- Losing keys, phone or paperwork, and forgetting appointments or bills
- Feeling restless inside, fidgeting, or finding it hard to relax and switch off
- Acting on impulse, for example with spending, driving or quick decisions
- Starting lots of things but struggling to finish them, especially dull jobs
- Putting off tasks that need a lot of thought until the very last minute
- Talking a lot, interrupting, or finishing other people's sentences for them
- Strong feelings that come on fast, like frustration, boredom or irritability

Three main groups of symptoms

Inattention

Drifting off, missing details, losing things and putting off hard tasks.

Hyperactivity

Often inner restlessness in adults, fidgeting, or always needing to be busy.

Impulsivity

Acting before thinking, impatience, and risky choices with money or driving.

Often comes with

Anxiety, low mood, poor sleep, autism, dyslexia, alcohol or drug problems.

Who is more likely to have ADHD

A parent, brother or sister with ADHD

Born early or very small

Autism, dyslexia or dyspraxia

Epilepsy or a past brain injury

A very difficult early life

Men are diagnosed more often – women are often missed

Please turn over for what helps, what the doctor will do and when to get help

How you can help yourself

Small changes help, with or without medicine – and family and friends can help too.

Write it down

One diary or phone calendar, with alarms set.

Break it down

Split big jobs into small steps with deadlines.

Make room to focus

Mute notifications; work in short bursts.

Look after your body

Regular sleep, meals and exercise help focus.

Ask for adjustments

Work or college can offer a quieter space.

Go easy on alcohol

It worsens symptoms and may not mix with medicine.

What the doctor will do

1. **Listen** to how symptoms affect work, home and relationships, and whether they started in childhood.
2. **Check other causes** like low mood, anxiety, poor sleep or thyroid, plus heart, blood pressure and weight.
3. **Refer you to a specialist**, who makes the diagnosis. If you go private, ask about shared care first.
4. **Follow up.** After a specialist starts medicine, a GP may prescribe and check your blood pressure and weight.

Bring: school reports, someone who knew you as a child, and your screening answers.

Call 999 if

- You have chest pain, fainting, or a racing or irregular heartbeat
- You have taken an overdose or are in danger of harming yourself
- Someone is very confused, or seeing or hearing things others don't

Contact us the same day if

- You feel your heart pounding or dizzy after a medicine change
- You feel very low or anxious, or have thoughts of suicide
- You stop sleeping or eating, or lose weight on ADHD medicine

Evenings and weekends: **NHS 24 on 111**. To talk to someone now: **Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87** or **Samaritans 116 123**.

Living well with ADHD

ADHD is lifelong, but with understanding, practical strategies, talking therapy and, for many, medicine, most adults find daily life calmer and more organised – and many bring real energy and creativity.

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