

Serious Childhood Problems
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder - Part 2
By Mike Witzky and Jym Ramage

One of the most commonly seen disorders in children is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, also known as ADHD. It is estimated that between 3% and 10% of pre-adolescents suffer symptoms of ADHD. These symptoms are divided into two main groups, those that involve difficulties with attention span and concentration, and those that involve excessive activity and difficulties with calming down and remaining quiet.

More difficult to spot symptoms of ADHD are those that include difficulties with concentration and attention span. These children's symptoms are often not noticed in their early years at home or at school because their behaviors don't typically cause many problems to others. The most noticeable sign for these children are grades below their academic potential, and difficulties with organization and routine. These children consistently struggle to remember where they put their book bag last night, or to bring the books home from school they need for homework that night. They often say they just don't remember the teacher's instructions (or insist that you never did ask them to take out the garbage), and can't seem to complete more than one or two tasks without drifting off into something else. Again, some of this behavior is normal for any child, but what sets symptoms of ADHD apart are repeated difficulties with completing age appropriate tasks or schoolwork, and response to negative consequences. Most children who forget their homework remember it the next day, after not being allowed to watch TV or see their friends the night before. Children with ADHD symptoms rarely show improvement from typical, negative consequences alone. Also, these children will often report difficulties with paying attention and are easily distracted by even small things going on around them, such as another child walking to the pencil sharpener, a bird outside the window or someone tapping a pencil on their desk.

Some children suffer from a combination of these symptoms, having trouble both with hyperactivity, and attention span and concentration. Like children who suffer from only one set of symptoms, these children show little improvement through negative consequences alone, and struggle with both calming down and remembering details. Fortunately, children with both sets of symptoms are often easier to spot, and receive help sooner. There are many interventions that can help children and adolescents who suffer symptoms of ADHD. Many of these are behavioral interventions, such as helping children develop better organizational habits, utilizing monitoring systems that more easily help parents and schools work together, and rewarding positive behavior more than punishing negative behavior. Other interventions include the use medication, which makes it easier for children with ADHD symptoms to stay focused, be less distracted and less hyperactive. Most medications that have been used with beneficial effect on symptoms of ADHD have been stimulant medications, such as Ritalin or Adderall. While many parents question the use of "uppers" to help children calm down, low doses of these medications have been shown to stimulate the parts of the brain that regulate attention and calming. This, in effect, "speeds up" the "slowing down" process and helps children focus and stay still.

A new non-stimulant medication, called Stratera, has also been shown to have beneficial effects on ADHD symptoms, without some of the difficult side effects of stimulant medication. Of course, only a doctor can help parents decide if medication, and which medications, may be right for their child. Other behavioral therapists and mental health professionals, as well as educational specialists, can help families develop behavioral strategies to overcome ADHD symptoms, as well as monitor any medication effectiveness. Such monitoring is important to share with doctors who are prescribing medication to help ensure that the child is properly medicated.

If you think your child may have ADHD or if you have questions regarding ADHD, please go to the “*Find a Service Provider*” section of the BHG Web site <http://www.bhg.org> to locate a behavioral healthcare agency in your county.

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