



# Attention Deficit Disorder

Attention Deficit Disorder is a mental disorder, found in children, that is defined as developmentally, inappropriate, inattention and impulsivity with or without hyperactivity.

Simply put, children with Attention Deficit Disorder exhibit restlessness or jitteriness and they have a short attention span and poor impulse control.

They are often difficult to manage as toddlers and preschoolers. In later childhood, they may exhibit continuous movement of the lower extremities, purposeless movement and fidgeting of the hands, impulsive talking and seeming lack of awareness of their environment.

Attention Deficit Disorder occurs typically before age three and invariably before age seven and affects 5 to 10 percent of school-aged children. It is seen four times more frequently in boys than girls.

## Causes

The cause of Attention Deficit Disorder is unknown. Several theories have been proposed that point to biochemical, sensory and motor, and physiologic causes. Diagnosis is often difficult because no particular organic signs or set of neurologic indicators are specific. The primary signs are behavioral and vary with situation and time. Social and medical histories and school reports are essential for diagnosis.

## Symptoms

There are three primary signs of Attention Deficit Disorder:

**Inattention**- failure to finish tasks started, easy distractibility, seeming lack of attention, and difficulty concentrating on tasks requiring sustained attention

**Impulsivity**- acting before thinking, difficulty taking turns, problems organizing work and constant shifting from one activity to another

**Hyperactivity**- difficulty staying seated and sitting still and running or climbing on things excessively, "always on the go" (Although hyperactivity tends to diminish with age, residual symptoms and signs can extend well into adulthood.)

## Treatment

No single treatment has been completely effective with all children; however, medications combined with behavioral and cognitive therapies have the greatest control on symptoms. The most crucial aspects of a treatment plan are parental attitudes and cooperation.



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The use of behavior modification has been advocated as an alternative to stimulants for the following reasons:

stimulants do not work in roughly 20 percent of cases

some children develop limiting side effects, including insomnia, weight loss and headaches

some parents do not want their children on medication, no matter how convinced their doctor is of the value of medications

medications have not shown convincing evidence of being able to positively affect the child when the child has a learning disorder or has a long standing problem with completing homework