

New Diagnosis: ADHD

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a **neurodevelopmental disorder** that affects **executive functioning**.

A **neurodevelopmental disorder** is something that affects how the brain develops. ADHD brains are different from non-ADHD brains in particular ways.

Executive functioning is what lets us make and follow plans, control impulsive behaviour and speech, manage our reactions to emotions, and choose what to pay attention to and for how long.

So, in words that are easy to understand, ADHD is a disorder that: affects brain development and makes it hard for people:

- to get stuff done,
- to control impulses and emotions, and
- to pay attention to what they want and need to pay attention to.

ADHD has been known as many different things over the years, including “minimal brain dysfunction” and “attention deficit disorder with and without hyperactivity.” The current name is “Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)” and the three types as described later in this booklet.

North America and some countries in other parts of the world use the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). The fifth edition (DSM-5) came out in 2013. In the DSM-III, the disorder was called ADD; in 1994, in the DSM-IV, that was changed to ADHD, and it was split into three different types. So basically, the term “ADD” is old terminology that we don’t use anymore. However, most people who use this term mean Inattentive ADHD, or “ADHD without the H” (H meaning “hyperactivity”).

The ICD-10 is the diagnostic manual used in the rest of the world, and it still has a diagnosis of ADD included while also using ADHD for Hyperactive ADHD. We don’t know when the next edition will be published or if this will be changed at all.

Types of ADHD

ADHD—Primarily Inattentive Type is what most people mean when they say “ADD.” It is characterized by “daydreaming” and difficulty focusing on things that are important to focus on.

ADHD—Primarily Hyperactive/Impulsive Type is what most people think of when they hear “ADHD.” It is characterized by physically hyperactive behaviours and impulsive behaviours, like moving around a lot and talking without thinking first.

ADHD—Combined Type is just what it says: it’s a combination of symptoms from both of the other two types.

Having a diagnosis of Inattentive type does not mean you won’t show symptoms of Hyperactive/Impulsive type, and vice versa. The diagnostic criteria state that you must have at least six symptoms (or five if you’re 17 or older) listed for a particular type, and Combined type is considered to be an even split of symptoms from the other two types (meaning at least five or six symptoms—depending on age—per type, so 10 or 12 total).

Treatment Options

Medication—This is the first-run option. Several types of stimulant and non-stimulant medications are available to treat ADHD. A lot of people never get past this component of a treatment plan, and that’s not great because you need to be prepared if you have to stop taking medication for some reason.

Diet—A good diet that has lots of protein (not like ridiculously high, just higher than average) is important for good brain function. Other important components here include Omega-3 fatty acids (found in eggs and fish, for the most part) and plenty of vegetables, as well as complex carbohydrates (e.g., whole wheat bread and pasta, beans, potatoes).

Exercise—Regular exercise (especially cardio) is amazingly good for your brain! It wakes up your entire body and keeps dopamine in your system, which is great since dopamine is one of the primary neurotransmitters involved in ADHD.

Sleep—When we sleep, our bodies do a bunch of things like healing and rejuvenating. Our brains do that, but they also work through all of the events of the day, committing things to long-term memory and stuff like that. We need to make sure we’re getting at least eight hours of sleep per night to make sure our brains are functioning at their best.

Supplements—Krill oil (or other fish oil), rhodiola, reishi, and other supplements can be helpful in promoting optimum functioning. Dr Amen also has some suggestions in his book *Healing ADHD*.

ADHD Coaching—ADHD coaches help you learn, develop, and implement strategies that work for you, so that you can better manage your ADHD symptoms and be able to do well if you have to stop taking medication.

Talk Therapy—Sometimes you have a lot of stuff you need to work through, so this can be very helpful, whether you see a counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)—This is a type of behavioural therapy where the practitioner (a psychologist or social worker with training in CBT) helps you think through your behaviours and come up with better ways to react to different situations.

Meditation—If you're able to meditate, this can be really helpful in getting your mind centred and teaching your brain to actually concentrate or focus on what you want it to.

Mindfulness—This is something I've been hearing more about lately, and it seems to be about getting us to focus on the actual now and the immediate future, rather than dwelling on the past or thinking really far into the future. Being truly present in the moment instead of jumping ahead in conversations or tuning out because something else caught our attention.

I'm sure I've missed something, but this is just an overview of the things I have read about or implemented myself. As you can see, there are lots of options for managing your ADHD! And like I said at the beginning, even if you take medication your treatment plan needs to include at least diet, exercise, and sleep as well. Coaching is another good thing to include.

Your Future with ADHD

Regardless of how long you've been diagnosed and how severely your life has been impacted by your symptoms, you do stand a chance at achieving success in your life. You just might need to adjust your expectations regarding what success looks like for you and how you're going to achieve it.

Do your best to access whatever supports and treatment you can to help you manage your life. Decide what you want to do with your life, and think about the best way to do that. Take into account how you learn best, what symptoms you struggle with the most, which ADHD traits seem to be helpful for you, and how you might be able to use those difficult symptoms to actually help you along the road to success.

Remember that success is different for everyone, and it's okay to have a life that is different from the rest of the world. As long as it's the life you want, and you're living on your terms, doing what you want/need to do and not hurting anyone else (or yourself), you have achieved success. And every moment spent working towards achieving that life is part of your success, even if you never actually reach that full dream.

You can do this.

I believe in you.

<http://actuallyadhd.tumblr.com>

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The content of this booklet originally appeared on the Tumblr listed above and/or was written by the blog founder, Janna Willard.

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