



What You Need to Know About

ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

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Who is CADDAC?

The Centre for ADHD Awareness, Canada (CADDAC) is a national not-for-profit organization providing leadership in awareness, education and advocacy for ADHD across Canada. CADDAC is committed to increasing the understanding of ADHD and therefore decreasing the stigma, by providing up-to-date scientific information on ADHD. CADDAC's mandate is to take a leadership role in networking all organizations, professionals, patients, caregivers, governments and other stakeholders involved in ADHD related issues.



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What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD?

Quick Facts on ADHD

- ADHD is classified as a neurodevelopmental disorder. It has been documented for more than 200 years.
- ADHD is a common childhood disorder leading to impairments in learning and behavior.
- ADHD remains under-recognized and under diagnosed and misdiagnosed in Canada.
- ADHD occurs in at least 4% of adults and 5% of children worldwide.
- Scientific studies have shown that ADHD is a disorder that most often lasts throughout someone's lifetime.
- Eighty percent of children diagnosed with ADHD continue to qualify for a diagnosis in adolescence and at least 60% continue to be impaired by symptoms in adulthood.
- All forms of attention regulation are impaired in ADHD. Those with ADHD can over-focus and have difficulty breaking their focus, if something is stimulating, as much as they have problems with under focusing.
- ADHD is recognized by all major medical associations and government health agencies as a "real" medical disorder.

Children, adolescents and adults with untreated ADHD are at a greater risk for:

- Learning difficulties, less success at school, higher school dropout rates, and fewer years of schooling
- Less work productivity, lower paying jobs, moving from job to job and more unemployment
- Additional mental health disorders
- Problems with self esteem
- Difficulty with personal relationships
- Substance abuse
- Involvement in the justice system
- More accidents and injuries
- More automobile accidents
- Earlier death

What Does ADHD Look Like?

Adult ADHD can present very differently in different people. But, everyone who has ADHD is impaired, or has more difficulty than normal, with regulating their attention or focus. This is often referred to as inattention.



Impairment in regulating attention is experienced as:

- Difficulty staying focused, especially when things are seen as boring;
- Being over focused and not able to break focus when things are interesting or stimulating;
- Difficulty switching focus especially when over focusing;
- Not being able to focus on the most important thing (prioritizing focus), rather than the most stimulating thing.

Symptoms of ADHD are not under the person's control

ADHD symptoms can change throughout the day and from day to day. This means that the person with ADHD may be able to pay attention and complete their work in the morning but be unable to do so in the afternoon. This makes it appear as if the person with ADHD is choosing not to pay attention, or simply being lazy, but this is not the case. ADHD symptoms can also worsen according to the place or situation. For instance, a very noisy or stimulating environment can make it much more difficult for someone with ADHD to pay attention. Everyone has some of these symptoms occasionally, but those with ADHD have more of these symptoms and to a degree that makes daily functioning difficult.

Many people with ADHD are unaware of their ADHD symptoms



Those with ADHD are unable to experience what it is like not to have ADHD, so functioning with ADHD impairments is normal. People with ADHD are often told that they are just lazy and unmotivated. Since they may have great difficulty at school or in a learning environment due to their ADHD, they often feel that they are not as bright and capable of learning as others. This is not true. In fact, ADHD does not affect someone's IQ. Those with ADHD are just as smart as others; they just learn differently and need specific supports.

Many people with ADHD also have difficulty with regulating their emotions



Those with ADHD become frustrated, over whelmed and angry more easily; they are also less able to express these emotions in acceptable ways. They are often more irritable and moody. ADHD is a disorder of self-regulation; this means that those with ADHD find it more difficult to control, or regulate their behavior. They know what they should be doing, but are unable to do it. They might blame others for their problems and not realize how their own behaviour affects those close to them.

ADHD can look very differently in different people

Some people with ADHD may be hyperactive (move excessively) and impulsive (act before thinking) along with their attention problems; this is Combined ADHD. Others may only have difficulty with attention regulation; this is primarily inattention ADHD. Attention issues, while not the most annoying symptoms, are of most concerning symptoms, because they cause difficulty in learning, at work and in daily functioning.

Impairment or difficulty in Executive Functioning (EF) frequently comes along with ADHD

EF impairment can cause difficulty with:

- Starting a task and completing work
- Organization and time management
- Problem solving
- Remembering lists and sequences, routines and details
- Social skills and interacting with others
- Regulating emotions and behaviour
- Working memory (holding and working with thoughts in your mind for very brief periods of time)

Examples of Possible ADHD Symptoms

Problems with Attention Regulation

- Not being able to pay attention for a period of time, especially while reading, doing paperwork or working on things that are repetitive and boring
- Being easily distracted by sounds, sights and thoughts
- Being unable to pay close attention to details, making careless mistakes
- Hyper focusing and being unable to break focus and refocus attention, especially when involved in activities that are very interesting
- Difficulty focusing and staying focused on the important thing rather than the interesting things
- Forgetting to complete tasks even if they are common activities
- Frequently losing necessary things
- Poor listening skills
- Tuning out while being spoken to
- Difficulty staying focused while reading
- Excessive daydreaming

Problems with Hyperactivity

- Fidgeting, finger drumming, leg shaking etc.
- A feeling of internal restlessness
- A mind that races or switches focus frequently
- Unable to relax
- Talking too much or too fast
- Craving excitement and seeking out high risk activities
- Trying to do too many things at once

Problems with Impulsivity

- Acting before pausing to think
- Making impulsive decisions before thinking things through
- Spending without first considering if it is wise to do so
- Talking at the wrong time
- Interrupting others
- Speaking without thinking - blurting out things that are hurtful or rude
- Becoming easily bored
- Being reckless without considering consequences
- Quick to react to emotions in unacceptable ways
- Jumping from job to job and relationship to relationship without a plan

Problems with Executive Functioning

- Difficulty doing the most important tasks first
- Disorganization - messy home, office desk and car
- Procrastination - putting off doing difficult but necessary tasks
- Trouble starting and finishing projects
- Difficulty managing time - often running late and unable to complete work

- Difficulty with planning
- Unable to use past experiences and forward thinking when making decisions
- Feelings of under achievement
- Starting numerous projects but not completing them
- Depending on others to organize and handle most of the household duties especially paperwork

Difficulty Regulating Emotions

- Reacting emotionally to a greater degree than others
- Emotional outbursts
- Impatience
- Irritability
- Difficulty staying motivated
- Oversensitive to criticism
- Becoming easily frustrated and unable to deal with frustration
- Moods swings - excited and happy and then annoyed and down soon after
- Angry outbursts
- Anger can fade very quickly or continue longer than normal

Additional Red Flags

- Difficulty with relationships
- Difficulty interacting socially
- Frequent job changes and job loss
- Less job satisfaction
- Less years of schooling and difficulty in learning environments
- More school discipline issues
- Holding more than one job
- Choosing jobs that are more active and less detail orientated
- Financial difficulties - difficulty paying bills on time and managing money
- Less work performance than others
- Frequently late for appointments and social engagements
- Substance use and abuse issues including alcohol, coffee and high caffeine drinks, cigarettes, marijuana
- More frequent driving accidents and speeding incidents
- More frequent physical accidents
- More rule breaking and interaction with the justice system
- Problems with self esteem
- Difficulty coping with stress
- Persistent mild depression
- Worrying
- Difficulties with parenting
- Unable to recognize own behaviour and effect on others

ADHD Treatment

The important thing to know about ADHD is that it is fairly easy to treat.

While treatment for ADHD should never be just medication, ADHD medication has been proven to be safe and effective. ADHD medication does not cure ADHD; it decreases many of the ADHD symptoms while in your system.



Medication for ADHD has been around for more than 70 years, but the medications of today, are much improved. They are time released only requiring one dose per day. These medications have also been designed so they are far more difficult to abuse - inject or inhale in order to “get a high”.

Please Note: using ADHD medications when not prescribed to you or in doses higher than prescribed can cause health risks.

Treatment for ADHD should always be a combination of treatments

These can be beneficial when used along with medication but can also be implemented without medication.



Simple healthy habits that can improve brain functioning are:

- Regular aerobic exercise
- A healthy balanced diet, high in proteins
- Good sleep habits

Other non-medication treatments for ADHD are:

- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)
- ADHD Coaching
- Mindfulness

ADHD can be accompanied by other problems such as:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Learning disabilities
- Bipolar Disorder
- Autism

These disorders should be ruled in or out by a medical professional when ADHD is being diagnosed. Treating ADHD when an unknown additional disorder exists will decrease the likelihood of a positive outcome. At the same time, treating one of these disorders when an underlying condition of ADHD is present but not treated will result in unsuccessful or non-treatment of both disorders.

Please Note: Trying to self-treat ADHD symptoms with other substances such as alcohol, tobacco, a large number of caffeinated drinks or drinks with high caffeine content, marijuana, and street drugs can cause health risks.

ADHD in the Workplace



Many adults with ADHD perform their jobs extremely well and find that some of their ADHD traits: high energy, problem solving, creativity, and being able to hyper-focus, are benefits in their type of work. However, for other adults with ADHD at least some of their ADHD symptoms will cause difficulties in the workplace.

How and if your ADHD impacts your job performance depends on many factors:

- The type and level of your symptoms
- The well your job suits you
- How successful you are in using strategies to support your ADHD symptoms

Some Examples of How ADHD Symptoms May Impact Job Performance:

Difficulties with Attention Regulation

- Unable to stay focused during tasks or meetings
- Becoming bored quickly which increased inattention
- Difficulty switching focus quickly
- Hyper-focusing and forgetting about other tasks or appointments
- Difficulty following lengthy directions and instructions
- Poor listening skills
- Inattention to detail

Distractibility

- External distractions - unable to block out noise and others moving around
- Internal distractions - own mind wandering

Impulsivity

- Committing to tasks and projects impossible to complete
- Blurting out inappropriate or regrettable thoughts and comments
- Jumping into projects without a plan
- Impulsively jumping from job to job

Hyperactivity

- Unable to sit in meetings
- Constant movement, pacing, tapping
- Unable to remain seated at desk

Time management impairments

- Under estimating time required to complete tasks
- Missing deadlines
- Getting to work late and unprepared

Organization difficulties

- Staying on track of what needs to be done
- Becoming easily overwhelmed
- Misplacing work documents and materials
- Maintaining an organized work space

Forgetfulness

- Forgetting schedules, routines, due dates, or tasks
- Unable to remember commitments to boss and coworkers

Procrastination

- Putting off unpleasant tasks until the last minute
- Late or rushed completion of work
- Taking too long to complete tasks, late on projects or excessive overtime to meet deadlines

Emotional Dysregulation and difficult relationships with co-workers

- Overly emotional to criticism by boss or coworkers
- Dwelling on things that others said or did that you think was negative towards you
- Easily angered and expressing anger inappropriately
- Unable to view situations as anything other than black and white
- Difficulty reading social cues
- Monopolizing discussions, interrupting or being overly blunt

What to do if ADHD Symptoms are Impacting Job Performance?



- Seek out a diagnosis and get treated if you have not already done so
- Find out if your HR department or boss/manager knows anything about ADHD and appropriate accommodations
- Put some thought into what type of things could help you be more productive and successful at work and try and make your request reasonable
- Go to, the CADDAC web site and look up, [Understanding Adult ADHD](#) and [ADHD in the Workplace](#) for examples of [Workplace Accommodations and Strategies](#)
- Approach the issue of asking for any changes as a win for both you and the company by saying things like, “I can be more productive if, I can have a quieter place to work“; “I can be on time if I can start an hour later.“, “I can do the job more thoroughly if I can take notes on what you want me to do.“

NOTE: ADHD is recognized as a legitimate disability by many Human Rights Commissions which allows for accommodations to be put in place. However, you will be required to share the fact that you have ADHD and provide a medical report stating this to your employer for these rights to kick in. Your employer is not allowed to share your medical information with your coworkers unless you give your permission.