

special educational provision, can be effective. For those children with ADHD where medication is indicated, the most commonly prescribed drugs are methylphenidate (Ritalin) and dexamphetamine (Dexedrine). These stimulate the part of the brain that regulates activity. Other medications may also be helpful eg. atomoxetine (Strattera).

These drugs can have a dramatic and calming effect on the behaviour of some children. Children often say medication helps them think more clearly, understand better and feel more in control of themselves. This in turn helps them to respond to other kinds of help and to get on better with other people.

However, medication is not a cure and should be used when remedial measures alone have been insufficient. Medication works best if it is used as part of a treatment package which is tailored to the child's individual needs.

Diet

Certain foods and food additives may seem to make some children overactive, irritable or inattentive. Any worries about food can be discussed with a paediatric dietitian.

Help at school

Most children with ADHD will have special educational needs as it affects their ability to learn. They will need an individual education plan and some will need a full statement of special educational needs from the local education authority.

Children suffering from ADHD at school can be greatly helped if their condition is properly understood and they are given the structure,

help and adult support they need. It can make a great deal of difference if children are given a regular routine in the classroom in which they are not distracted. They benefit too from clear instructions, sufficient time to do their work and a variety of physical activities. Many children with ADHD are creative and artistic and it is important that they are rewarded for their achievements.

Where can I get help?

YoungMinds Parents Information Service (PIS)

The PIS can tell you more about help available and where to find it locally, including local child and family consultation services (child guidance clinics) and local youth counselling and information services. The PIS can also tell you what different professionals do and how they can help. You can contact the PIS on the helpline telephone number below.

YoungMinds

PO BOX 52735, LONDON EC1P 1YY
Office telephone: 020 7336 8445
YoungMinds Order Line: 0870 870 1721
Parents Information Service: 0800 018 2138
(Monday and Friday 10am-1pm, Tuesday and Thursday 1-4pm, Wednesday 1-4pm and 6-8pm)
Fax: 020 7336 8446
Email: enquiries@youngminds.org.uk

Website: www.youngminds.org.uk YoungMinds is the national charity committed to improving the mental health of all babies, children and young people. YoungMinds Parents Information Service is a free confidential telephone service providing information and advice to any adult with concerns about the mental health of a child or young person.

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What is Attention
Deficit
Hyperactivity
Disorder?

Children and ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition in which children find it very difficult to focus their attention or control their behaviour. They usually cannot concentrate for long and they often do or say things on impulse without thinking.

People often use the term hyperactive to describe someone who is simply noisy and boisterous. But when doctors diagnose a child's hyperactivity as a symptom of ADHD, they mean that the child has a more serious problem. In the UK, many professionals use the term 'Hyperkinetic Disorder' to describe the condition. Where the major problem is poor concentration it can be called Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

What are the signs of ADHD?

Children who have ADHD are restless and can't sit still or do one thing for very long. They are easily distracted. Because they find it so hard to pay attention, they may often be criticised for being careless and making too many mistakes at school. They appear not to listen when someone is talking to them, find it hard to wait their turn and can be disruptive in their play. Some children with ADHD can concentrate for longer periods on things which really interest them, for example computer games, but can be easily distracted.

Of course, all children behave impulsively and find it hard to concentrate sometimes. But with ADHD, this behaviour is persistent and occurs wherever the child is, not just in one place such as school or at home. Symptoms usually start when a child is a toddler, and always before they reach the age of six or seven.

Children can have ADHD in varying degrees of severity, and sometimes it is found together with other conditions such as dyslexia. But it is important to understand that just because a child is naughty or defiant or aggressive it does not always mean that he or she has ADHD. There may well be other reasons for this kind of behaviour: the child may be anxious or there may be problems in the family or school. ADHD is a distinct condition, part of the make-up of the child.

How common is ADHD?

Estimates vary but recent studies have shown that about 1-2 in 100 children have significant levels of ADHD. More children have milder problems. It is more common among boys than girls, but the reasons for this are not clear.

What causes ADHD?

Most experts believe ADHD results from a problem in the part of the brain which controls our impulses and our capacity to concentrate. However the picture is complicated. It is probable that a combination of factors can lead to the difficulties the child experiences, factors within the child and between the child and his family.

Why is ADHD a problem?

Children with ADHD can sometimes behave in ways that are very challenging and hard to manage. They can be very exhausting for parents and siblings – the whole family may become very stressed – and this can lead to further problems.

Because children with ADHD have concentration difficulties, they find it hard to learn at school. Whatever their level of intelligence, they may

often feel 'no good' or 'stupid'. If nothing is done, their education suffers.

They can also be very irritating to other children, so they may find it hard to make friends. They often feel lonely, unloved or disliked. This can lead to some children becoming more aggressive over time. As they get older, children with ADHD may seek out friends with similar difficulties, and may start to get into serious trouble.

How can I get help?

If you think your child may have ADHD, you should discuss this with your child's teacher and school nurse. You should also see your GP, who, if necessary, may refer you to a specialist, such as a child and adolescent psychiatrist or a paediatrician, who is qualified to carry out a full assessment. They can distinguish ADHD from other conditions which may cause similar behaviour. There is no simple test for ADHD. They take into account the family's worries about the child, how the child is progressing and behaving at home and at school, as well as medical and family background. Many children also benefit from a psychological assessment which can identify any special educational needs. At the end of this leaflet are details on where to go for help.

What help is available?

It is important that all who are involved with the child, eg. parents, teachers, child and adolescent psychiatrists, work together to assess and agree on ways of managing the child as a whole person. A variety of approaches including medication, behavioural therapy, individual counselling, family meetings and