

Understanding ADHD in Adults

This leaflet provides information about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in adults. It explains what the diagnosis means, how it may affect daily life, and the types of support and management options that may be available. If you are unsure about anything in this leaflet, you should discuss it with a healthcare professional involved in your care.

What does an ADHD diagnosis mean?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition that usually begins in childhood and can continue into adulthood. It affects how the brain manages attention, activity levels, and impulse control.

Symptoms of ADHD generally fall into two main areas:

- Inattention
- Hyperactivity and impulsivity

Many adults experience difficulties in both areas, although some may mainly struggle with one rather than the other.

Common symptoms of ADHD in adults

ADHD can affect people in different ways, and not everyone will experience the same symptoms. Adults with ADHD may experience difficulties such as:

- Difficulty concentrating or staying focused
- Problems with organisation and time management
- Frequently losing or misplacing items
- Forgetfulness and difficulty prioritising tasks
- Restlessness or feeling on edge
- Difficulty waiting, interrupting others, or speaking impulsively
- Mood changes, irritability, or low frustration tolerance

You may not experience all of these symptoms. What matters most is how symptoms affect your day-to-day life, including work, education, relationships, and self-confidence.

Why does ADHD look different in different people?

ADHD does not affect everyone in the same way. Some people may continue to meet the full criteria for ADHD into adulthood, while others may have fewer symptoms but still experience ongoing difficulties.

Adults with ADHD may also experience other challenges alongside ADHD, such as anxiety, depression, low mood, anger difficulties, or problems with alcohol or substance use. These can interact with ADHD symptoms and affect how the condition presents.

Support is available for these difficulties, and they can be addressed alongside ADHD as part of your care.

What causes ADHD?

ADHD is thought to be influenced by a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

Research suggests that ADHD can run in families, meaning close relatives may be more likely to have the condition. Differences in certain brain pathways involved in attention and impulse control have also been identified.

Environmental factors, such as complications during pregnancy or early development, may play a role alongside genetic influences. ADHD is considered a neurodevelopmental condition rather than something caused by lifestyle or parenting.

What treatment and management options are available?

There are different ways ADHD may be managed in adults, depending on individual needs and circumstances.

Management options may include:

- Medication, where appropriate, following specialist assessment and ongoing review
- Education and understanding of ADHD and how it affects you
- Practical strategies and self-help techniques to manage daily tasks and routines

Psychological therapies specifically for ADHD in adults are still being developed, but some people find behavioural strategies and lifestyle changes helpful alongside medical treatment.

Will I need to take medication long term?

There is no single answer to this. Some people find medication helpful for managing symptoms over time, while others may be able to reduce or stop medication as their circumstances change.

Decisions about ongoing treatment are reviewed regularly and are based on how symptoms affect your work, relationships, and overall functioning. These decisions should always be made in discussion with a healthcare professional.

Support with work, education, and daily life

ADHD is recognised as a condition that may require reasonable adjustments in work or education settings. Support may include changes to working arrangements, additional time for tasks, or other adjustments to help you manage more effectively.

With your consent, occupational health teams or educational support services may work with healthcare professionals to better understand your needs and provide appropriate support.

Driving, alcohol, and lifestyle considerations

ADHD can affect concentration and attention, which may have implications for driving. Depending on individual circumstances, you may need to inform the relevant licensing authority and follow their guidance.

Alcohol can affect attention and concentration and may interact with ADHD symptoms or medication. Advice about alcohol use should be discussed with your healthcare professional.

Healthy routines, regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and avoiding recreational drugs can help support overall wellbeing and symptom management.

What can I do to help myself?

Many people find it helpful to:

- Understand how ADHD affects their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour
- Develop structured routines and organisational strategies
- Build regular physical activity into daily life
- Reduce alcohol intake and avoid recreational drugs
- Seek reliable information about ADHD

Learning about the condition and identifying strategies that work for you can be an important part of managing ADHD.

When to seek further help

If you have concerns about your symptoms, treatment, or overall wellbeing, you should contact a healthcare professional involved in your care.

If you feel at risk or are worried about your safety or the safety of others, seek urgent help through appropriate healthcare or emergency services.

Finding reliable information

Reliable information about ADHD is available from trusted healthcare organisations and professional bodies. Using accurate sources can help you understand your condition and make informed decisions about your care.

If you are unsure about information you have found, discuss it with a healthcare professional.