

# Ask the Expert

## - ADHD

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### Q: What is ADHD? What are the symptoms of ADHD?

**A:** Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neuro-developmental disorder; this means that the symptoms are present from an early age, usually before seven years old. As the name suggests, the symptoms of ADHD are characterised by serious and persistent difficulties in three areas, namely: inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity.

Some of the symptoms in each area include:

#### Inattention:

- Not paying attention to details or making careless mistakes
- Difficulty sustaining attention in tasks
- Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- Does not complete task
- Difficulty organising tasks and activities
- Avoids or dislikes tasks that require sustained mental effort
- Often loses things
- Easily distracted by surroundings
- Forgetful

#### Hyperactivity:

- Fidgety or often squirms in seat
- Cannot remain seated
- Runs about or climbs excessively
- Difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly
- Energetic, as if "driven by a motor"
- Talks excessively

#### Impulsivity:

- Blurts out answers before questions are completed
- Difficulty queuing or awaiting turn
- Interrupts conversations or intrudes on others

### Q: How is ADHD different from just 'being naughty'?

**A:** It is quite normal for children to exhibit some of the above symptoms at times. However, it is worthy to take note when the above behaviours:

- Become severe and persistent over time
- Become pervasive and occur consistently all the time, whether it is at home or in school
- Impair their ability to make friends, get along with others or perform their tasks

In such an instance, the child may be suffering from ADHD.

### Q: I think my child may be experiencing some of the symptoms of ADHD. Does he need to seek professional help or will he grow out of it?

**A:** It may be helpful to speak to teachers about their observations of your child's behaviour in school. If the child exhibits such behaviour as well, then it may be helpful to seek professional help. It is possible for a child to grow out of ADHD but it is difficult to predict when and if this will happen. Studies have shown that about half of the children with ADHD can outgrow their symptoms during adolescence.

### Q: What is the treatment for ADHD? How can family and friends help?

**A:** The main aim of treatment is to reduce symptoms or prevent the child from becoming impaired by his/her symptoms, for example in terms of developing peer relationships or in their academic performance. The two main modalities of treatment include behavioural intervention and medication.

Behavioural intervention involves teaching parents (or caregivers) and teachers various strategies to reduce the child's ADHD behaviours. Examples of strategies include reducing environmental distractions and rewarding the child for desirable behaviour.

For more severe symptoms of ADHD, medication may be needed for better control of symptoms. Research has shown that these medications (such as methylphenidate and atomoxetine) increase specific chemicals or neurotransmitters in the brain and therefore reduce ADHD symptoms.

Parents often find themselves feeling stressed from caring for their children who have ADHD, and support from other family members and friends are therefore important. It is also important not to label the child as 'naughty' or 'lazy', as this can lower their self-esteem.

### Q: Does my child need to see a psychiatrist or can he see a GP or counsellor?

**A:** There are several avenues of help. Your child's school counsellor will be able to discuss with you about your child's behaviour and if he is likely to be suffering from ADHD. They can refer your child to the community mental health team REACH (Response, Early Intervention and Assessment in Community Health) for an assessment. The team consists of experienced health professionals who work closely with school counsellors and can assess if your child has ADHD, and advise on the choices of treatment. It is also possible to seek an assessment with a child psychiatrist directly for assessment and treatment.