



Care at
Mayo Clinic ▼

Health
Library ▼

For Medical
Professionals ▼

Research & Education
at Mayo Clinic ▼

Giving to
Mayo Clinic ▼

Request appointment  Log in 

Diseases & Conditions

Adult attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

[Request an Appointment](#)

[Symptoms & causes](#)

[Diagnosis & treatment](#)

Overview

Adult attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a mental health disorder that includes a combination of persistent problems, such as difficulty paying attention, hyperactivity and impulsive behavior. Adult ADHD can lead to unstable relationships, poor work or school performance, low self-esteem, and other problems.

Though it's called adult ADHD, symptoms start in early childhood and continue into adulthood. In some cases, ADHD is not recognized or diagnosed until the person is

Advertisement

Mayo Clinic does not endorse companies or products. Advertising revenue supports our not-for-profit mission.

Advertising & Sponsorship

an adult. Adult ADHD symptoms may not be as clear as ADHD symptoms in children. In adults, hyperactivity may decrease, but struggles with impulsiveness, restlessness and difficulty paying attention may continue.

Treatment for adult ADHD is similar to treatment for childhood ADHD. Adult ADHD treatment includes medications, psychological counseling (psychotherapy) and treatment for any mental health conditions that occur along with ADHD.

Products & Services

[A Book: Mayo Clinic Family Health Book](#)

[Show more products from Mayo Clinic](#)

Symptoms

Some people with ADHD have fewer symptoms as they age, but some adults continue to have major symptoms that interfere with daily functioning. In adults, the main features of ADHD may include difficulty paying attention, impulsiveness and restlessness. Symptoms can range from mild to severe.

Many adults with ADHD aren't aware they have it — they just know that everyday tasks can be a challenge. Adults with ADHD may

Mayo Clinic Press

Check out these best-sellers and special offers on books and newsletters from [Mayo Clinic Press](#).

[Mayo Clinic on Incontinence](#)

[The Essential Diabetes Book](#)

[Mayo Clinic on Hearing and Balance](#)

[FREE Mayo Clinic Diet Assessment](#)

[Mayo Clinic Health Letter - FREE book](#)

find it difficult to focus and prioritize, leading to missed deadlines and forgotten meetings or social plans. The inability to control impulses can range from impatience waiting in line or driving in traffic to mood swings and outbursts of anger.

Adult ADHD symptoms may include:

- Impulsiveness
- Disorganization and problems prioritizing
- Poor time management skills
- Problems focusing on a task
- Trouble multitasking
- Excessive activity or restlessness
- Poor planning
- Low frustration tolerance
- Frequent mood swings
- Problems following through and completing tasks
- Hot temper
- Trouble coping with stress

What's typical behavior and what's ADHD?

Almost everyone has some symptoms similar to ADHD at some point in their lives.

If your difficulties are recent or occurred only occasionally in the past, you probably don't have ADHD. ADHD is diagnosed only when symptoms are severe enough to cause ongoing problems in more than one area of your life. These persistent and disruptive symptoms can be traced back to early childhood.

Diagnosis of ADHD in adults can be difficult because certain ADHD symptoms are similar to those caused by other conditions, such as anxiety or mood disorders. And many adults with ADHD also have at least one other mental health condition, such as depression or anxiety.

When to see a doctor

If any of the symptoms listed above continually disrupt your life, talk to your doctor about whether you might have ADHD.

Different types of health care professionals may diagnose and supervise treatment for ADHD. Seek a provider who has training and experience in caring for adults with ADHD.

[Request an appointment](#)

From Mayo Clinic to your inbox

Sign up for free and stay up to date on research advancements, health tips, current health topics, and expertise on managing health. [Click here for an email preview.](#)

[Learn more about Mayo Clinic's use of data.](#)

Subscribe!

Causes

While the exact cause of ADHD is not clear, research efforts continue. Factors that may be involved in the development of ADHD include:

- **Genetics.** ADHD can run in families, and studies indicate that genes may play a role.
- **Environment.** Certain environmental factors also may increase risk, such as lead exposure as a child.
- **Problems during development.**

Problems with the central nervous system at key moments in development may play a role.

Risk factors

Risk of ADHD may increase if:

- You have blood relatives, such as a parent or sibling, with ADHD or another mental health disorder
 - Your mother smoked, drank alcohol or used drugs during pregnancy
 - As a child, you were exposed to environmental toxins — such as lead, found mainly in paint and pipes in older buildings
 - You were born prematurely
-

Complications

ADHD can make life difficult for you. ADHD has been linked to:

- Poor school or work performance
- Unemployment
- Financial problems
- Trouble with the law

- Alcohol or other substance misuse
- Frequent car accidents or other accidents
- Unstable relationships
- Poor physical and mental health
- Poor self-image
- Suicide attempts

Coexisting conditions

Although ADHD doesn't cause other psychological or developmental problems, other disorders often occur along with ADHD and make treatment more challenging. These include:

- **Mood disorders.** Many adults with ADHD also have depression, bipolar disorder or another mood disorder. While mood problems aren't necessarily due directly to ADHD, a repeated pattern of failures and frustrations due to ADHD can worsen depression.
- **Anxiety disorders.** Anxiety disorders occur fairly often in adults with ADHD. Anxiety disorders may cause overwhelming worry, nervousness and other symptoms. Anxiety can be made worse by the challenges and setbacks caused by ADHD.

- **Other psychiatric disorders.** Adults with ADHD are at increased risk of other psychiatric disorders, such as personality disorders, intermittent explosive disorder and substance use disorders.
- **Learning disabilities.** Adults with ADHD may score lower on academic testing than would be expected for their age, intelligence and education. Learning disabilities can include problems with understanding and communicating.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

[Request an appointment](#)

Diagnosis & treatment

Jan. 25, 2023

[Print](#)

[Show references](#)

Related

Associated Procedures

[Cognitive behavioral therapy](#)

Products & Services

[A Book: Mayo Clinic Family Health Book](#)

[Show more products and services from Mayo Clinic](#)

CON-20155292

5X Challenge

Give Today

Thanks to generous benefactors, your gift today can have 5X the impact to advance AI innovation at Mayo Clinic.

Medical Professionals

Researchers

Find a
doctor

Explore
re
career
s

Sign
up for
free
e-
newsl
etters

About Mayo Clinic

About this Site

Contact Us

Locations

Health Information Policy

Medicare Accountable Care
Organization (ACO)

Media Requests

News Network

Price Transparency

AskMayoExpert

Clinical Trials

Mayo Clinic Alumni Association

Refer a Patient

Businesses

Executive Health Program

International Business
Collaborations

Facilities & Real Estate

Supplier Information

Students

Admissions Requirements

Degree Programs

Student & Faculty Portal

Research Faculty

Laboratories

International Patients

Appointments

Financial Services

International Locations & Offices

Charitable Care & Financial Assistance

Community Health Needs
Assessment

Financial Assistance Documents
– Arizona

Financial Assistance Documents
– Florida

Financial Assistance Documents
– Minnesota

Follow Mayo Clinic

Get the Mayo Clinic app

