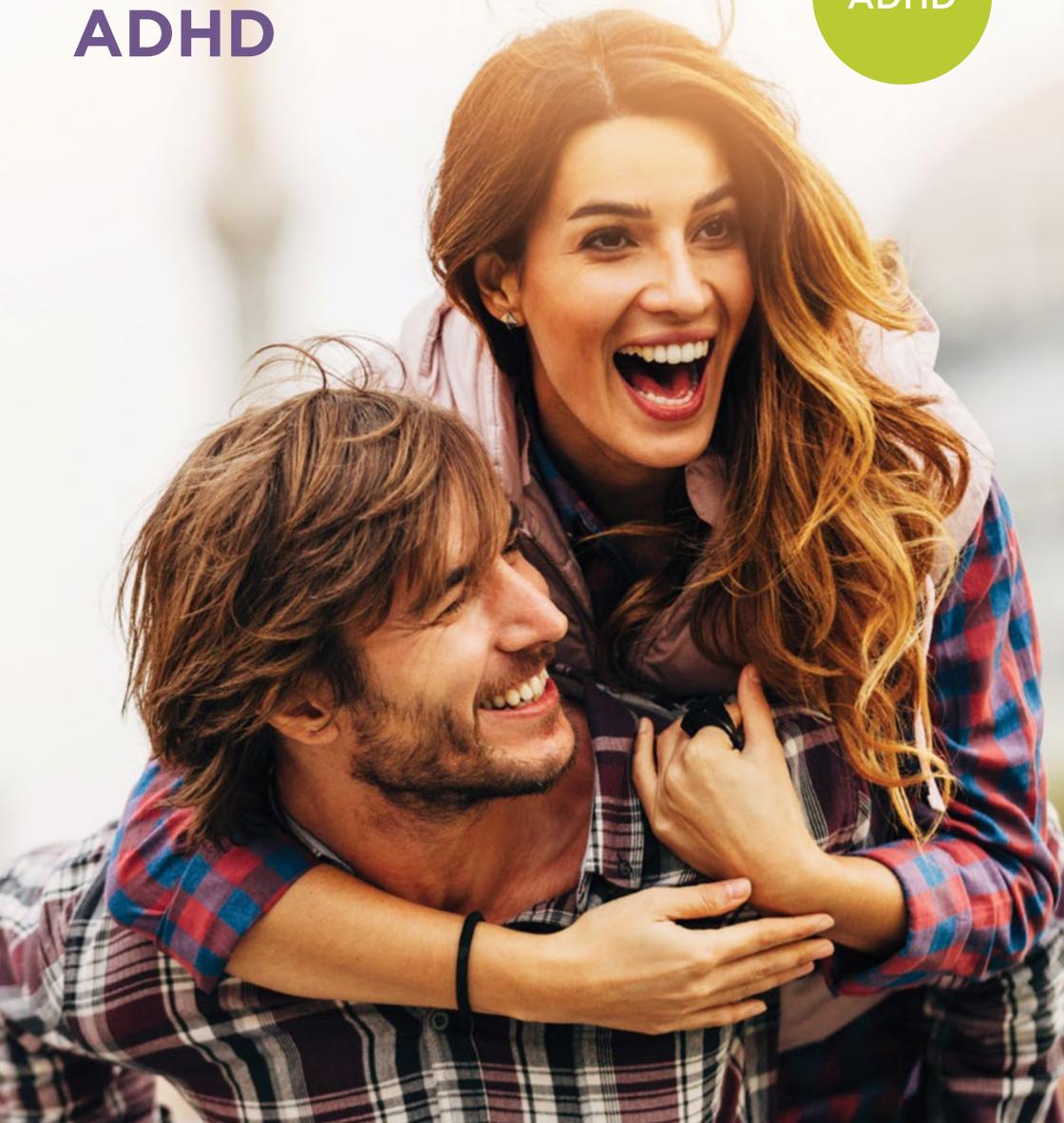


# Understanding ADHD

ADHD



A guide for adults diagnosed with ADHD



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This booklet has been developed to help you understand more about ADHD symptoms and how ADHD is diagnosed. It cannot, however, take the place of talking to your doctor. If you have any questions or would like more information, please consult your doctor.



# Understanding ADHD

## What is ADHD?<sup>1,2</sup>

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is characterised by excessive levels of inattentive and/or hyperactive and impulsive behaviour.

ADHD symptoms can vary. To diagnose ADHD, your doctor may discuss with you whether or not you have had:

- At least five inattentive and/or five hyperactive/impulsive symptoms
- Symptoms that have been present for at least six months
- Any symptoms that could have started before you were 12 years old
- Symptoms in at least two settings, such as home and work
- Symptoms that greatly interfere with work, family or social interactions
- Symptoms that are not better explained by another cause

# What are the symptoms of ADHD?<sup>1,2</sup>

Everyone with ADHD is different and may have different symptoms. Below is a list of symptoms that you may have had trouble with, like paying attention or sitting still.

## If you have inattention, you may have noticed that you often:<sup>1</sup>

- Don't pay close attention to details
- Make careless mistakes at work or during other activities
- Have difficulty sustaining attention during tasks
- Don't listen when spoken to directly
- Don't follow through on instructions, and fail to finish jobs or duties at home or in the workplace
- Have difficulty organising tasks and activities
- Avoid engaging in tasks requiring mental effort

- Lose items necessary for tasks or activities
- Are easily distracted by external stimuli and unrelated thoughts
- Are forgetful in daily activities

## If you have hyperactivity and impulsivity, may have noticed that you often:<sup>1</sup>

- Fidget, tap your hands and/or feet, or squirm in your seat
- Get up from your seat in situations when you need to remain seated, like meetings
- Are always on the go
- Feel restless
- Talk excessively
- Blur out an answer before a question has been completed
- Have difficulty waiting your turn
- Interrupt or intrude on others

**Please remember these are not the only criteria that may be used to diagnose ADHD. Diagnosis should be based on a complete history and evaluation by a qualified doctor.<sup>3</sup>**



## What causes ADHD?<sup>1,4-7</sup>

Research has identified that genetics may increase the risk of developing ADHD. Brain function or environmental factors, such as prenatal exposure to nicotine and alcohol, may also increase the risk of developing the disorder. However, the exact causes of ADHD are still not known and studies are ongoing.

## How is ADHD diagnosed?<sup>1-3</sup>

ADHD is usually diagnosed in childhood. Symptoms can change over time from the preschool years through to adulthood. Symptoms seen in early childhood may not necessarily remain at the same intensity. For example, hyperactivity symptoms may appear less obvious in adolescence and adulthood, but difficulties with restlessness, inattention and impulsivity may persist.

Not everyone with ADHD has all of the symptoms of hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattention. However, for you to be diagnosed with ADHD, your symptoms should be associated with at least a moderate degree of psychological, social and/or educational or occupational impairment.

A diagnosis of ADHD may only be made by a psychiatrist or another appropriately qualified healthcare professional, on the basis of a full clinical and psychosocial assessment that may include:

- Discussion about your behaviour and symptoms in different settings of everyday life
- Compiling a full developmental and psychiatric history
- Looking at whether your symptoms could be caused by anything else
- Finding out whether or not you have a family history of ADHD or mental health problems (such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder) to rule out other possible causes for symptoms





# How is ADHD treated?

## Managing ADHD<sup>3,8</sup>

Treatment and management should take into account your needs and preferences. You should have the opportunity to be involved in decisions about your care and treatment, in partnership with your doctor.

While there is no specific cure for ADHD, there are programs that may help you to manage your symptoms. The initial management program should be recommended by your doctor after a comprehensive assessment and discussion with you. The program may include psychosocial management strategies, medication and/or educational interventions.

Cognitive behaviour therapy may help you develop strategies and learn practical techniques to reduce the impact of your ADHD symptoms. These may include problem-solving skills, techniques to reduce distraction and stress management skills.

Coaching is another approach that you may find useful. It aims to help identify and draw on your personal strengths, and identify strategies to help you cope with life on a daily basis. The aim is to change old behaviour patterns by developing new ones. This may include identifying personal goals or generating strategies to address potential obstacles.

# What can I do to help manage my ADHD?<sup>9</sup>

- To help you remember things, post appointments or to-do lists in prominent places where you'll see them – on bulletin boards, the back of doors and the fridge
- Put notepads in strategic places, such as the car, kitchen or by your bed, so you can write down any reminder notes or thoughts as they pop into your head
- Use a mobile, iPad or diary to immediately write down any reminders, commitments or things to do
- Practise proactive planning by taking a few minutes every evening to organise and prepare items such as books, clothes and keys for the next day
- Have multiple sets of keys made, so losing one is not a disaster
- Prevent feeling overwhelmed or discouraged by large tasks. Split them into smaller tasks that are easier to manage
- Where possible, delegate tedious, uninteresting or detail-oriented work or household tasks to others

## Medication<sup>3,8,9</sup>

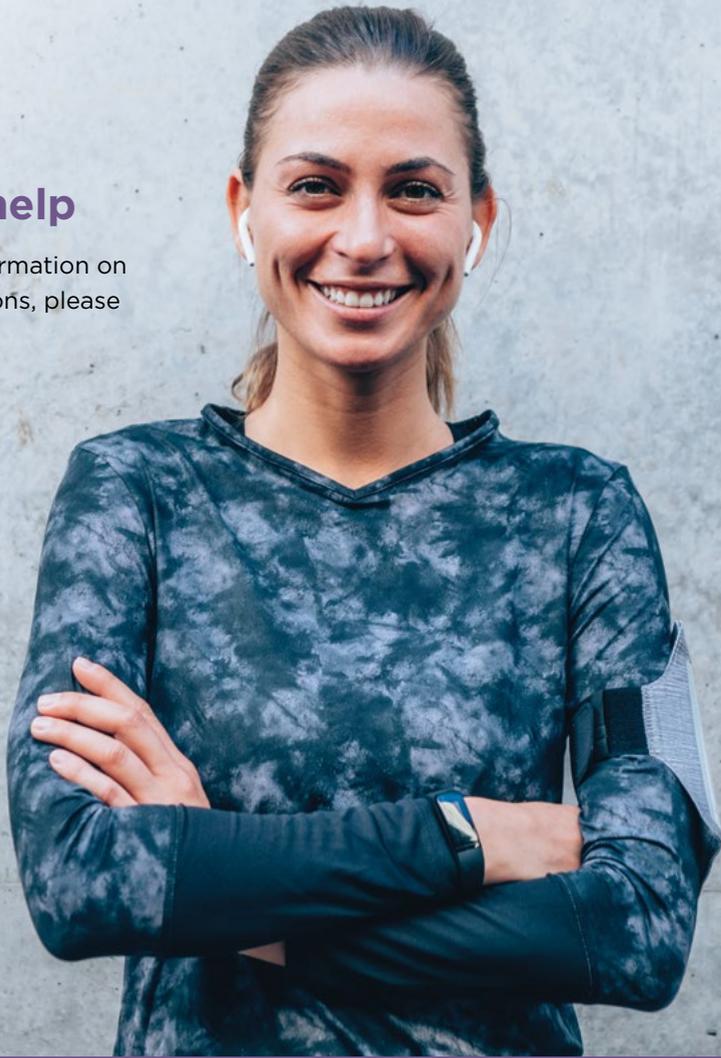
Not everyone with ADHD requires treatment with medication. If medication is considered, it should only be based on a comprehensive assessment and advice from your doctor. Medication is not a cure, and is recommended to be used in conjunction with behavioural strategies.

If you do need medication, your doctor will work with you to decide which one works best. It may take some time to find the right medication and dose level. As with all medication, ADHD medications must be taken exactly as prescribed.



## Where to get help

If you would like more information on ADHD and treatment options, please speak to your doctor.



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