



Therapy Area Guide

ADHD



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Facts about ADHD:

- Although the term ADHD is a relatively new one, the symptoms of the disorder were first described over 2,000 years ago¹²
- ADHD affects 3–9% of school-age children and young people in the UK and 2% of adults worldwide²
- Severe ADHD or hyperkinetic disorder is estimated to affect 1–2% of children and young people in the UK²
- Of the young people with a sustained diagnosis, most will go on to have significant difficulties in adulthood, which may include continuing ADHD, personality disorders, emotional and social difficulties, substance misuse, unemployment and involvement in crime²

Facts about GKA's experience in ADHD:

ADHD has always been a challenging disease area yet it remains one of the most important areas for healthcare market research.

Healthcare fieldwork agency GKA has been carrying out research projects in ADHD for more than a decade, running [insert number] projects in recent years alone.

Strong relationships with both patient organisations and our dedicated finder network are key elements in our ability to recruit large numbers of validated participants for both adult and child studies.

With close ties to several specialist centres, we have built a unrivalled panel of more than 800 psychiatrists, as well as 50+ child psychiatrists and 100+ nurse psychiatrists, the majority of whom regularly treat ADHD patients.

The Lowdown

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD is a group of behavioural symptoms that include inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness. It is the most common behavioural disorder in the UK.

Symptoms of ADHD tend to be first noticed at an early age and may become more noticeable when a child's circumstances change, such as when they start school. Most cases are diagnosed in children between the ages of 6 and 12 and while symptoms generally improve with age, some people who are diagnosed at a young age will continue to experience problems into adulthood.¹

Not every person with ADHD has all of the symptoms of hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattention. However, for a person to be diagnosed with the condition, their symptoms should be associated with at least a moderate degree of psychological, social and/or educational or occupational impairment.²

ADHD is much more frequently diagnosed in boys than girls, partly because the condition is more difficult to identify in girls, who tend to display less hyperactivity and more inattentiveness than boys. Girls are also less likely to have co-existing disruptive behavioural problems.³

The impact of ADHD can be considerable as it affects many aspects of a person's life, extending far beyond poor behaviour or problems at school. Children with ADHD often act without thinking, are hyperactive and may have trouble focusing, symptoms which can have a significant impact on early development, family life, relationships with friends, school discipline and on society as a whole.⁴

Causes and symptoms

The exact cause of ADHD is not fully understood, although a combination of factors is thought to be responsible, particularly genetics and differences in brain function and structure. ADHD tends to run in families and research shows that both parents and siblings of a child with ADHD are four to five times more likely to have ADHD themselves.

Research has also identified a number of possible differences in the brains of people with ADHD compared to those without the condition, although the exact significance of these is not clear. Other possible causes, such as premature birth, low birth weight, exposure to alcohol, smoking or drugs in the womb and brain damage, have been proposed but the evidence is inconclusive.

ADHD is characterised by symptoms of impulsivity and hyperactivity and/or inattention. Hyperactive or impulsive behaviours can include fidgeting, having trouble playing quietly, interrupting others and always being 'on the go.' Symptoms of inattention can include being disorganised, forgetful or easily distracted and finding it difficult to sustain attention during activities.⁵

Children with ADHD may also exhibit behaviours that cannot be explained by any other psychiatric condition, such as mood swings and 'social clumsiness', where they may misread the accepted social cues and say or do inappropriate things.⁶

ADHD is a developmental disorder and it is believed that it cannot develop in adults without first appearing in childhood. More research is needed into the symptoms of ADHD in adults but it is known that problems experienced by children with ADHD, such as depression or dyslexia, may continue into adulthood. In adults, ADHD-related behavioural problems can cause problems such as difficulties with relationships, social interaction, drugs and crime, and some find it difficult to find and stay in a job.⁷

Diagnosis and treatment

Children with ADHD have a disability; research evidence shows that it is a legitimate condition with clearly identifiable symptoms and clinically effective treatments.⁸

Diagnosing ADHD in children depends on a set of strict criteria whereby a child must have six or more symptoms of inattentiveness or six or more symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsiveness. To be diagnosed with ADHD, a child must also have:

- been displaying symptoms continuously for at least six months
- started to show symptoms before the age of 12
- been showing symptoms in at least two different settings
- symptoms that make their lives considerably more difficult on a social, academic or occupational level
- symptoms that are not just part of a developmental disorder or difficult phase, and are not better accounted for by another condition.⁹

There is no cure for ADHD but treatment can help relieve symptoms and improve day-to-day life. Most patients find a combination of medication and therapy is the best treatment.

Drug treatment is not recommended for pre-school children with ADHD, for whom parent-training/education programmes should be first-line treatment. For children and young people of school age with ADHD and moderate impairment, group-based parent-training/education programmes are usually the first-line treatment, while drug treatment is recommended for school-age children and young people with severe ADHD.²

References

- 1 – www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/Pages/Introduction.aspx
- 2 – www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg72
- 3 – www.fullattention.co.uk/adhd-and-shire/what-is-adhd
- 4 – www.ukadhd.com/what-is-it.htm
- 5 – www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/Pages/Causes.aspx
- 6 – www.addiss.co.uk/payingenoughattention.pdf

Medication

There are four types of medication licensed for the treatment of ADHD: methylphenidate, dexamfetamine, lisdexamfetamine, and atomoxetine. These medications can help someone with ADHD concentrate better, be less impulsive, feel calmer, and learn and practise new skills.

Methylphenidate, the most commonly used medication, as well as dexamfetamine and lisdexamfetamine act by stimulating activity in the parts of the brain that control attention and behaviour. Atomoxetine works differently; it increases the amount of noradrenaline in the brain, aiding concentration and helping to control impulses. All four medications have side effects, although atomoxetine has also been linked to more serious side effects, including suicidal thoughts and liver damage.

Therapy

Therapies can be useful in treating ADHD in children, teenagers and adults, as well as helping with additional problems such as conduct or anxiety disorders. Such therapies include psychoeducation, behaviour therapy, parent training and education programmes, social skills training and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

In addition, many people find diet and nutritional supplements (such as omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids) helpful but there is no strong evidence that these work.¹⁰

References

- 7 – www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/Pages/Symptoms.aspx
- 8 – www.ukadhd.com/adhd-diagnosis-treatment.htm
- 9 – www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/Pages/Diagnosis.aspx
- 10 – www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/Pages/Treatment.aspx
- 11 – www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/Pages/LivingwithADHDpage.aspx
- 12 – www.fullattention.co.uk/adhd-and-shire/the-history-of-adhd

Helpful advice for adults with ADHD includes:

- Stay organised by making lists, keeping diaries or sticking up reminders
- Let off steam by exercising regularly
- Find ways to relax
- Speaking to an employer about ADHD can help avoid problems at work
- Join a local or national support group.¹¹

Living with ADHD

Caring for a child with ADHD can be exhausting and stressful. Helpful advice to parents includes:

- Plan the day so your child knows what to expect
- Set clear boundaries so your child knows what behaviour is expected
- Be positive and give specific praise
- Give brief and specific instructions if you are asking your child to do something
- Set up an incentive scheme using a points chart or star chart to reward good behaviour
- Intervene early and watch for warning signs
- Keep social situations short and sweet
- Exercise can help your child wear themselves out and improve their quality of sleep
- Keep an eye on what your child eats to see if certain foods prompt certain behaviours
- Stick to a routine at bedtime; sleep problems and ADHD can be a vicious circle
- Children with ADHD often have problems with behaviour at school so speak to their child's teachers/ special educational needs co-ordinator.

If you have been asked to run a healthcare market research project on ADHD and would like to talk to someone who really understands all the aspects of this condition, why not send an email or give us a call today?



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