

## ADD/ADHD IN ADOLESCENTS

Attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (more commonly referred to as ADD or ADHD – though AD/HD is the technically correct abbreviation) is a neurologically based condition in children that is characterized by problems with attention, impulse control, and hyperactivity. Even though the symptoms develop in childhood, they can persist into adolescence and adulthood. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, about 80 percent of those who required medication for ADD or ADHD as children, still need it as teenagers.

The symptoms of ADD/ADHD in teens are similar to those in children, however, during teen years, especially as the hormonal changes of adolescence are going on, symptoms like these may intensify:

- Distractibility
- Irritability
- Poor concentration
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity

### LIVING AS A TEEN WITH ADD & ADHD

The adolescence years can be a difficult time for anyone. Teens are just beginning a transition period in their lives, moving away from childhood and into adulthood. Pressures increase. Expectations are raised. Academics and social issues become even more complex. Their feelings of self-consciousness and insecurities may be raised. Self-esteem is often more fragile.

A teen with ADHD may experience the world as a frustrating whirlwind. Planning ahead, finishing work, staying on track, organizing activities, following conversations – these tasks often require exhausting effort. Obstacles may seem insurmountable. Many teens with ADHD have difficulty in school. Grades may fall, particularly if the teen is not receiving ADHD treatment. This is a very good time for parents and administrators to get involved.

Just as important as academic success, social acceptance and establishing relationships becomes paramount during adolescent years. Peers become an increasingly important presence in a teen's life, often even more influential than parents. Peer pressure takes on a greater role. As they begin to experience more and more freedom and independence, adolescents may engage in risky, impulsive behaviors. Immediate decisions must be made about alcohol, smoking, drugs, and sexual activity. Teens with ADHD may be impulsive, risk-taking, immature in judgment, and thrill seeking. All of these traits combined make accidents and serious injury more likely...All the more reason for adults to get involved.

## TREATMENT

Studies show that getting proper treatment for ADHD in teens may cut the risk of later alcohol and drug abuse.

Typically, a combination of sustained medication in addition to behavior therapy is best in treating teens with ADHD. The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry all recommend behavioral intervention to improve behavioral problems that are a part of ADHD.

Stimulant medications are prescribed to treat teens with ADHD. These drugs may increase alertness and help teens perform better at school. Examples of stimulant medications include: Adderall, Focalin, Ritalin, Quillivant XR, and Vyvanse. There are non-stimulant medications such as Intuniv, Kapvay, and Strattera are also used to treat teens with ADHD. Non-stimulant medications for ADHD do not have the side effects of stimulant drugs- for instance, they don't increase anxiety, irritability, and insomnia as stimulant drugs may.

## HOW CAN PARENTS HELP A TEEN WITH ADHD?

Because ADHD affects all aspects of a teenager's life, as a parent, your first goal should be to talk openly with your teen. Remember to be supportive and accepting at all times.

Here are some helpful suggestions for helping your teen manage their ADHD:

- Provide clear, consistent expectations, directions, and limits.
- Set a daily schedule and keep distractions to a minimum.
- Support activities where your teen can have personal success (sports, hobbies, or music lessons, for example).
- Build your teen's self-esteem by affirming positive behavior.
- Reward positive behavior, and set consequences for negative behavior. It is helpful for teens to receive frequent feedback that is clear and specific. Focusing on strengths and using praise is always more effective than only focusing on the negatives.
- Set consequences for bad behavior.
- Help your teen with scheduling and organization- a regular routine, daily planner, and checklists are all helpful.
- Keep a structured routine for your family with the same wake-up time, mealtime, and bedtime.
- Set up a reminder system at home to help your teen stay on schedule and remember projects that are due. Reduce clutter and organize home and school items.
- All teens, whether or not they have ADHD, need to get plenty of sleep. Physical exercise and good nutrition are also important. A good sense of humor is essential.
- Work with your teen's teachers to make sure your teen is on task at school.
- Stay calm when disciplining your teen.
- Set firm rules for the TV, computers, phones, video games, and other devices. Make sure all of these are turned off well before bedtime.

Nurture your relationship with your teen and provide them with plenty of support and love. This will help navigate through all the ups and downs of the challenges of living with ADD/ADHD.