

ADDITUDE *Inside the ADHD mind*

ADHD & Symptom Tests > ADHD Guide

TYPES OF ADHD & ADD

ADD vs. ADHD Symptoms: What's the Difference?

ADD is the term commonly used to describe symptoms of inattention, distractibility, and poor working memory. ADHD is the term used to describe additional symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsivity. Both are included in the medical diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Here, we explain its two distinct presentations.

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What Is ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)?

ADD (attention deficit disorder) is the term commonly used to describe a neurological condition with symptoms of inattention, distractibility, and poor working memory. Patients who have trouble focusing on school work, habitually forget appointments, easily lose track of time, and struggle with executive functions may have ADD — or what clinicians now call Predominantly Inattentive Type attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). ADD is an outdated term and no longer a medical diagnosis, though it is often still used to refer to a certain subset of symptoms that fall under the umbrella term, ADHD.

The Difference Between ADD and ADHD

Many people use the terms ADD and ADHD interchangeably, but they are not the same thing. ADD (attention deficit disorder) is the colloquial term for one particular type of ADHD — Predominantly Inattentive Type, formerly called attention deficit disorder. To summarize:

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (**ADHD**) is a neurological or psychological disorder.
- Technically speaking, attention deficit disorder (**ADD**) is no longer a medical diagnosis, but “ADD” is often used to refer to Predominantly Inattentive Type ADHD and associated symptoms
- Since 1994, doctors have been using the term ADHD to describe both the hyperactive and inattentive subtypes of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder¹.
- Still, many parents, teachers, and adults continue to use the term “ADD.”

Symptoms of ADD (Predominantly Inattentive Type ADHD)

Predominantly Inattentive Type ADHD (formerly ADD) does not present in the same way as the other two types of ADHD, known as Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type ADHD and Combined Type ADHD.

Hallmark symptoms of ADD include:

1. Poor working memory

2. Inattention
3. Distractibility
4. Poor executive function

[Self-Test: ADD Symptoms in Children](#)

[Self-Test: ADD Symptoms in Adults](#)

What Is ADHD?

The term **ADHD** is commonly used to describe what doctors now diagnose as Predominantly Hyperactive Type ADHD. The [ADHD symptoms](#) associated with this diagnosis align more closely with the stereotypical understanding of attention deficit:

- A squirmy, impulsive individual (usually a child)...
- Bursting with energy...
- Who struggles to wait his or her turn.

Adults with hyperactive or impulsive ADHD may be...

- Talkative
- Fidgety
- Have nervous energy

[Self-Test: ADHD Symptoms in Adults Adults](#)

[Self-Test: ADHD Test for Children](#)

What are the Symptom Differences Between ADD and ADHD?

People with ADD often lack the hyperactivity component that is a prominent symptom of Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive ADHD. They might be considered daydreamers or appear to be disinterested and disorganized in the classroom or the workplace. They can also be prone to forgetfulness and losing things, and struggle to follow instructions.

In comparison, those with Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive ADHD align more closely with the stereotypical understanding of attention deficit — a fidgeting, impulsive individual (usually a child), who is bursting with energy and struggles to wait their turn. Those with this type of ADHD tend to act out and demonstrate behavior problems.

How is ADHD Diagnosed?

There is no single test for Predominantly Inattentive Type ADHD (formerly ADD). In fact, since children with ADD are most often not disruptive in school, they may be mistakenly viewed as simply “shy” or a “in a world of their own.”

To make a diagnosis, your doctor will assess for any ADHD symptoms exhibited in the past six months. They will also do a physical exam and review your medical history to rule out any other medical or psychiatric conditions that could be causing symptoms.

Once a doctor has a full understanding of the presenting symptoms, they will be able to make determine which type of ADHD (if any) is the appropriate diagnosis. Find more information in our comprehensive [ADHD diagnosis guide](#).

A Closer Look at the 3 Types of ADHD

Symptoms of Primarily Inattentive ADHD (Formerly ADD)

People who say they have ADD most likely have symptoms of inattentive type ADHD like forgetfulness and poor focus, organization, and listening skills. Inattentive ADHD often resembles a mood disorder in adults, while it's seen as spacey, apathetic behavior in children, particularly girls.

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-V (DSM-V)*², six of the following symptoms must be present to warrant a diagnosis of ADHD, Primarily Inattentive Type:

- Often fails to give close attention to details, or makes careless mistakes
- Often has difficulty sustaining attention
- Often does not seem to listen when spoken to
- Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish projects
- Often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- Often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort
- Often loses things necessary for tasks/activities
- Is often easily distracted
- Is often forgetful in daily activities

If you think you have Primarily Inattentive Type ADHD, take one of our self-tests below and share your results with a medical professional.

Symptoms of Hyperactive-Impulsive ADHD

This sub-type encompasses many of ADHD's stereotypical traits: a child (usually a boy) [bouncing off the walls](#), interrupting in class, and fidgeting almost constantly. In reality, only a small portion of children and adults meet the symptom criteria for this type of ADHD.

According to the *DSM-V*, six of the following symptoms must be present to warrant a diagnosis:

- Fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
- Leaves seat in classroom or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected
- Runs about or climbs excessively in situations in which it is inappropriate; feelings of restlessness in teens and [adults](#)
- Has difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly
- Appears "on the go" or acts as if "driven by a motor."
- Talks excessively
- Blurts out answers
- Has difficulty waiting for their turn

- Interrupts or intrudes on others

[Self-Test: Hyperactive and Impulsive ADHD Symptoms in Children](#)

[Self-Test: Hyperactive and Impulsive ADHD Symptoms in Adults](#)

Symptoms of Combined Type ADHD occurs if you have six or more symptoms each of inattentive *and* hyperactive-impulsive ADHD.

How Does Hyperactive-Impulsive ADHD Look Different from Inattentive ADHD (Formerly ADD) in Everyday Life?

1. Inattentive ADHD Symptom: Careless Mistakes

A child with inattentive ADHD may rush through a quiz, missing questions he knows the answers to or skipping whole sections in his haste. An adult may fail to carefully proofread a document or email at work which leads to more problems.

2. Inattentive ADHD Symptom: Difficulty Sustaining Attention

A child with inattentive ADHD may have trouble staying focused during organized activities, like sports and games, or tasks, like picking up his room. An adult may struggle to maintain attention during lengthy readings or extended conversations.

3. Inattentive ADHD Symptom: Failure to Listen

Children and adults with inattentive ADHD may seem absent-minded when spoken to directly, even though there may not be an obvious distraction. Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (e.g., starts tasks but quickly loses focus and is easily sidetracked).

4. Inattentive ADHD Symptom: Difficulty with Instructions

Many children, teens, and adults with inattentive ADHD struggle to follow through on instructions, failing to finish schoolwork, chores, or other duties in the workplace.

5. Inattentive ADHD Symptom: Poor Organization

Organization can be a challenge for those with inattentive ADHD at any age — a child might struggle with keeping her locker organized; a teen may find it difficult to keep college applications straight; and ADHD adults might feel overwhelmed by work emails at the office. A lack of organization often goes hand in hand with messy work, poor time management, and a failure to meet deadlines.

6. Inattentive ADHD Symptom: Avoidance of Difficult Tasks

Adolescents and adults with inattentive ADHD often have a hard time completing projects that require sustained mental effort, like lengthy homework assignments, reviewing documents, and filling out forms.

7. Inattentive ADHD Symptom: Chronically Losing Things

Frequently misplacing important items, like keys, eyeglasses, cell phones, and school materials, can be a sign of inattentive ADHD in kids, adolescents, and adults.

8. Inattentive ADHD Symptom: Easily Distracted

Children with inattentive ADHD may become distracted in the classroom by extraneous stimuli, while adults may simply drift off into unrelated thoughts and lose focus on the task at hand.

9. Inattentive ADHD Symptom: Forgetfulness

Whether it's remembering to take the trash out, pay a bill, or return an email, inattentive ADHD often presents as forgetfulness, especially in teens and adults.

Do More Women Have Inattentive Type ADHD Than Have Hyperactive-Impulsive ADHD?

ADHD isn't gender-biased, but it often goes undiagnosed in girls. [More women and girls have Inattentive ADHD](#) than have Hyperactive-Impulsive ADHD. Young girls and women who struggle with inattentive ADHD symptoms are overshadowed by hyperactive boys, who demonstrate more stereotypical hyperactive ADHD behavior. Instead of detecting their symptoms as ADHD, medical professionals frequently mistake them for mood disorders. If you think you or your daughter may have ADHD symptoms, take our [ADHD test for women and girls](#) and share your results with a medical professional.

That said, Inattentive Type ADHD is not exclusive to girls. Many boys have this subtype of ADHD, though their symptoms may be similarly overlooked or misdiagnosed due to gender stereotypes.

***ADDitude* Seems to Write Only About ADHD. Why Is That?**

ADDitudeMag.com offers a wide range of articles about ADD and ADHD, which is the official, medical term used to describe attention deficit disorder — regardless of whether a patient has symptoms of hyperactivity. Because “ADD” is considered an outdated term by medical practitioners, we use the term “inattentive ADHD” to describe the sub-type *not* associated with hyperactivity or impulsivity. We use the term ADHD to broadly mean both the inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive sub-types, and “hyperactive/inattentive ADHD” when appropriate as well.

Footnotes

¹Lange, Klaus W et al. “The history of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.” *Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders* (Nov. 2010). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3000907/>

²Symptoms and Diagnosis of ADHD. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition. *American Psychiatric Association* (2013). [https://www.d\(.gov/ncbddd/adhd/diagnosis.html](https://www.d(.gov/ncbddd/adhd/diagnosis.html)

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