About ADHD in children, adolescents and adults
ADHD is not a new disease. ADHD and other disorders with similar symptoms have been described for more than a century. Although ADHD may seem more common today than in the past, this is largely due to an increase in research. Research has led to better awareness of the disease by healthcare professionals, leading to better diagnosis.

**ADHD: A lifelong condition**

If you (or your child) have been diagnosed with ADHD, you (or they) are not alone: ADHD is a common disorder.

**About ADHD**

ADHD affects between 5% and 12% of school-aged children, making it the most commonly diagnosed psychiatric disorder in childhood. This means that an average grade-school class will include between 1 and 3 children with ADHD.

**Is there a difference between Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)?**

ADHD is the accurate medical term for a condition that has had several other names in the past, including ADD.

**In children**

In fact, ADHD affects between 5% and 12% of school-aged children, making it the most commonly diagnosed psychiatric disorder in childhood. This means that an average grade-school class will include between 1 and 3 children with ADHD.

**In adolescents and adults**

What’s more, ADHD is not a disease that only occurs in children: patients with ADHD can continue to have symptoms into adolescence and adulthood. Among people diagnosed with ADHD as children, 80% keep their core symptoms of ADHD in adolescence and more than 60% keep some core symptoms in adulthood.
Whether in children, adolescents or adults, the diagnostic criteria for ADHD are the same. There are 3 symptom areas of ADHD that doctors look at: inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. However, as a patient gets older, the inattentive symptoms may be more frequent, as some patients tend to become less disruptive with age than they were during grade school.

Inattention may be the primary symptom in some patients, while hyperactivity and impulsivity may be the primary symptoms in others.

For a patient to be diagnosed with the
Inattentive Type of ADHD, at least 6 of the following symptoms must be present:

- Making careless mistakes or not paying attention to details
- Not being able to pay attention for a long time
- Not listening well
- Not finishing tasks
- Not being well organized
- Avoiding tasks that require a prolonged mental effort
- Losing personal belongings (in children: toys, homework and books; in adolescents and adults: keys, bills and wallet)
- Being easily distracted
- Being forgetful

For a patient to be diagnosed with the
Hyperactive-Impulsive Type of ADHD, at least 6 of the following symptoms must be present:

- Fidgeting and squirming
- Leaving seat
- Running and climbing when it’s not the time or place
- Difficulty with doing quiet activities
- “On the go”
- Talking excessively
- Blurtling out answers
- Not being able to wait his or her turn
- Intruding on others

Children with the Hyperactive-Impulsive Type of ADHD are often described as being a handful or “on the go.”

Adolescents and adults with the Hyperactive-Impulsive Type of ADHD may not be as physically hyperactive as children, but they often describe an internal feeling of restlessness or like their mind is always switching channels.

Patients affected by ADHD may also have problems in all categories of symptoms. When at least 6 symptoms are present in each category, this is called the Combined Type of ADHD.
Diagnosis of ADHD

You or your child have been diagnosed with ADHD because the symptoms:

- Were more severe than what is typically seen in patients of the same age
- Caused clinically significant impairment, such as in social, academic or occupational function, and were present in more than one setting, such as at school (or work) and at home
- Had been going on for at least 6 months

Diagnosis of ADHD requires doctors to rule out other problems that may look like or have some symptoms in common with ADHD. For instance, problems in school could also be caused by other medical problems such as poor vision, attention lapses from other causes or a middle ear infection that causes on-again/off-again hearing loss.

It is also true that everyone, regardless of age, will behave in a way that could be described as inattentive, hyperactive or impulsive at one point or another. Not every child who misbehaves or adult who has difficulty completing duties in the workplace will immediately qualify for a diagnosis of ADHD: this is why proper diagnosis is important.
ADHD across the lifespan

Although the diagnostic criteria for ADHD are the same for children, adolescents and adults, symptoms and subtypes may change for patients with ADHD over the course of their lives.

Hyperactivity and impulsivity may decrease as patients get older, while the demands on their attention and cognitive skills may increase with the responsibilities that come with adulthood. In other words, even adults with ADHD feel that it’s impossible to get organized, even though they may be able to sit quietly in a chair.

A correct diagnosis can, however, bring a sense of relief, whether it happens in childhood or adulthood: patients can then start to understand why they have certain problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The different phases of ADHD symptoms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Childhood/Adolescence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hyperactivity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ex.: Can’t sit still, always “on the go”</td>
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<td>• Ex.: Climbs or runs at inappropriate times</td>
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<td><strong>Impulsivity</strong></td>
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<td>• Ex.: Blurting out answers</td>
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<td>• Ex.: Intrusive, interrupting others</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inattention</strong></td>
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<td>• Ex.: Difficulty sustaining attention</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ex.: Easily distracted</td>
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<td>• Ex.: Difficulty completing schoolwork</td>
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Causes of ADHD

Research suggests that the symptoms of ADHD come from biological causes. ADHD is suspected to be a problem related to the hard wiring of circuits within the brain, as well as with the chemicals that carry signals within the circuits of the brain. Researchers believe that ADHD may be caused by a decreased level of certain of these chemicals, dopamine and norepinephrine, in certain parts of the brain.

We now know that ADHD is hereditary (it tends to run in families), which means that certain genes determine how the circuits and chemicals in our brains function.

ADHD is NOT caused by:

- A lack of willpower
- Watching too much television
- Bad parenting
- Too much sugar in the diet