

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder  
Information for individuals, partners  
and families

**NCMH**  
National Centre for Mental Health  
Canolfan Iechyd Meddwl Genedlaethol

# ADHD in adults



Ymchwil Iechyd  
a Gofal Cymru  
Health and Care  
Research Wales



Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that is mainly diagnosed in childhood, though sometimes it is not recognised until adulthood.

When diagnosed in childhood, ADHD often persists into adolescence and adulthood and has lifelong impacts.

ADHD is characterised by difficulties with hyperactivity, impulsivity, and attention.

Hyperactivity can include being unable to sit still, fidgeting, or finding it difficult to participate in activities quietly.

Sometimes, people with ADHD can appear to be 'on the go' or act as if 'driven by a motor'. Impulsivity can include interrupting (for example, butting into conversations), having difficulty waiting one's turn, or talking excessively.

Attention-related symptoms can include finding it difficult to pay close attention to details, being

easily distracted, being unable to remain focused on a specific task, or having problems following instructions or organising activities.

Many of us have these characteristics to some extent (we can all be impatient, over-enthusiastic, or find it difficult to focus).

For a health professional to make a diagnosis of ADHD, these symptoms must be severe, persistent and cause difficulties for the individual across different areas of their lives (at home, at university, in work and in your social life).

Everyday environments like work or university can pose challenges for people with ADHD, if the environment is not properly adjusted.

A thorough and careful assessment is important, as stress, anxiety, and mental health or physical health conditions can also present with features similar to ADHD.

Adults with ADHD may have a history of problems at school, frequent job changes, substance abuse, or getting in trouble with the law. They may also find they are more likely to have relationship or financial issues.

Although ADHD is more likely to be diagnosed in boys and men compared to girls and women, ADHD can affect people regardless of their gender. This gender gap is reducing as more women are receiving an ADHD diagnosis in adulthood.

## Childhood to adulthood

ADHD symptoms typically start in early childhood but are not always recognised and diagnosed at this age. For some people, symptoms reduce or are less obvious by adolescence, but for

others, the symptoms and their impact continue into adulthood.

It is possible that symptoms can have a greater impact in adolescence and adulthood, when young people are expected to be more independent and demands start to increase.

Alternatively, ADHD might become easier to manage in adulthood, when people are more able to choose roles and environments which suit their strengths and interests.

With the right support, people with ADHD can live successful and fulfilling lives.



## A complex neurodevelopmental condition

ADHD is a complex neurodevelopmental condition, which impacts on the brain and nervous system as it matures. It can affect the way people learn, experience, interact with, and understand the world and it can affect people in different ways.

While most people with ADHD will have difficulties with hyperactivity, impulsivity, and attention, some may have problems mostly with attention or mostly with hyperactivity and impulsivity.

ADHD affects some people to a greater extent than others, and other neurodevelopmental problems can occur alongside ADHD such as autism, tics, developmental co-ordination disorder (dyspraxia) and specific learning difficulties such as with reading (dyslexia).

Many people with ADHD also have difficulties with regulating their emotions (for example being irritable or getting angry easily).

They might find everyday environments emotionally challenging in ways that may be hard for others to understand and are likely to be exposed to more emotionally difficult experiences such as bullying and social rejection.

Some people may experience behavioural problems like anti-social behaviours. Others may also experience emotional problems such as anxiety or depression, or other mental health problems like eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or substance use.



## Getting help

If you believe you have symptoms of ADHD, you should discuss this with your GP, who can offer advice and may be able to refer you to a specialist.

Unfortunately, there is no quick and easy test for ADHD.

Getting a diagnosis of ADHD requires a full and detailed assessment, typically by a psychiatrist, including reports from childhood or information about you from someone who has known you for many years.

Different types of help are available depending on your situation:

- if you are a student, the Student Disability Services team can help
- if you are at university and looking for work, Access to Work can help
- if you are employed, your line manager, occupational health or Access to Work can help
- if you are unable to work, you can apply for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) to support you



# Managing ADHD

There are several different approaches to helping people with ADHD, which can be effective in managing the condition.

## Managing symptoms

Management of ADHD symptoms can be implemented both before and after receiving an official diagnosis.

This can include psycho-education (learning about ADHD), skills training, and small changes in the educational or workplace environment to minimise distraction and aid focus.

## Strategies to help

There are several strategies that could help with organisation:

- breaking down tasks into small separate tasks
- taking regular breaks
- using alarm reminders
- careful use of diaries and calendars

- digital software to help with checking spelling
- reading text out loud to catch any errors
- working in a diverse team with people who have different strengths and challenges to you

## Healthy lifestyles

A healthy lifestyle is also important. This includes ensuring you have regular and sufficient sleep, a healthy diet, avoiding illegal drugs and excess alcohol, getting enough regular exercise and having positive and meaningful social relationships with others.

## Talking therapies and other environmental supports

Although not a treatment directly aimed at ADHD, some people may benefit from talking therapies (such as cognitive behavioural therapy or CBT) a lifestyle coach, or other forms of external support.

In work, this could include having a manager who has

who has completed neurodiversity training, or asking a co-worker to assist in areas of struggle like proof reading and writing.

## Medication

Medication can be prescribed after an ADHD diagnosis. Medication has been shown to alleviate challenges associated with ADHD by reducing hyperactivity and impulsivity, enabling people with ADHD to concentrate and focus more effectively.

Common medications used to treat ADHD include Methylphenidate (Ritalin, Equasym, Concerta), Lisdexamfetamine, Atomoxetine, (Strattera), and Guanfacine.

The most used medications generally start to work shortly after each dose, and do not have a long-lasting effect. They can be very effective, but as with all medication, there is a chance of side effects.

Some research shows that adults with ADHD can be supported by combining talking therapy (such as cognitive behavioural therapy) with ADHD medication.

Not all adults with ADHD will need medication, and those taking medication may also need educational support or psychological treatment.









## Tips for adults with ADHD

- Remember that having ADHD is not a personality flaw but a different way of being in the world.
- Educating yourself and those around you can help fight some of the stigma associated with ADHD.
- Get support and find a community. Building a support network either in person or virtually can be helpful. You can share tips and ask for advice in informal, casual, and non-clinical settings. Just remember to only follow medical advice from a healthcare professional.
- Don't get discouraged if one type of management or medication doesn't work. Try something else until you find what works best for you.
- Explore which techniques work for you. Some people find that a balanced diet, exercise, reducing or cutting out alcohol, or getting enough sleep helps them manage their symptoms better.
- If you are at university, speak to the disability team and your supervisor or tutor.
- If you are working and you feel comfortable, disclose your diagnosis to your line manager and speak to occupational health to see what adjustments and accommodations could be made to help you.
- Know your rights. According to the 2010 Equality Act, ADHD is a disability and therefore a protected characteristic against discrimination.



## ADHD in the workplace and higher education

- The 2010 Equality Act legally requires employers to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace for employees with a disability or long-term health condition, which ADHD is included in.
- Reasonable adjustments are changes that can be made in the workplace to help mitigate a disadvantage that someone with ADHD may have, for example, allowing the use of noise cancelling headphones in a noisy office or also providing written rather than just verbal instructions. More information about this and more suggestions of adjustments, can be found at: [adhd.uk.co.uk/reasonable-adjustments/](https://adhd.uk.co.uk/reasonable-adjustments/)
- An Access to Work grant can assist you with starting and staying in work. It includes funding for workplace equipment and adaptation of equipment, travel costs, and other practical assistance such as a job coach. More information can be found at: [adhd.uk.co.uk/access-to-work/](https://adhd.uk.co.uk/access-to-work/)
- Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) covers costs related to studying with a disability, and includes software, mentoring and assistance in purchasing equipment. More information can be found at: [gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa](https://gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa)



## Useful websites

### NCMH

Our website has a dedicated ADHD section, including details on research, resources and suggested reading.

[ncmh.info/adhd](http://ncmh.info/adhd)

### Adult ADD UK (ADD-UK)

Information and resources for adults with ADHD.

[aadduk.org](http://aadduk.org)

### ADHD UK

Charity organisation helping those affected by ADHD in the UK.

[adhduk.co.uk](http://adhduk.co.uk)

### Royal College of Psychiatrists

This site provides a detailed patient information leaflet about ADHD in several languages as well as other mental health information. Search 'ADHD' from the homepage.

[rcpsych.ac.uk](http://rcpsych.ac.uk)

### NHS Choices

A comprehensive guide to ADHD from the NHS. Search ADHD from the homepage.

[nhs.uk](http://nhs.uk)



## Join our NCMH research community

Join our research community today and help us better understand ADHD. The aim of our research is to improve diagnosis, treatment, and support for people in the future.

Joining our community is easy - it involves completing an online sign-up form which takes about 15 minutes and will ask you about:

- personal information, like date of birth and ethnicity
- mental and physical health
- lifestyle

To join, visit: [ncmh.info/join](https://ncmh.info/join)

Or scan:



## Stay up to date



@thencmh



@ncmh\_wales



/walesmentalhealth



[www.ncmh.info](https://www.ncmh.info)

**Produced by the National Centre for Mental Health.**

The information in this leaflet is correct at the time of printing (January 2026).

NCMH is funded by Welsh Government through Health and Care Research Wales.

Mae'r wybodaeth hon hefyd ar gael drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg. I ofyn am gopi, cysylltwch â ni.

[info@ncmh.info](mailto:info@ncmh.info)  
029 2068 8401

