



## What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a disorder that consists of three distinct sub-types of symptoms experienced by both children and adults. The three sub-types are known as:

- Predominantly Inattentive Subtype
- Predominantly Hyperactive Subtype
- Combined Subtype

The Inattentive Subtype primarily involves difficulty consistently directing and sustaining one's attention. The Hyperactive Subtype primarily involves severe restlessness or difficulty remaining still, and in some cases, difficulty controlling one's impulses. The Combined Subtype describes people who demonstrate a significant portion of both inattentive and hyperactive symptoms.

Researchers are not certain what causes ADHD, but studies suggest that the origin of the condition is biological. ADHD is not a learning disorder. ADHD is diagnosed much more frequently in males than females with reported male-to-female ratios ranging from 4:1 to 9:1.

A diagnosis of ADHD does not mean that a person is of below average intelligence. Many persons who have ADHD score well above average on tests of intelligence, particularly when their intelligence is measured in a way that is not influenced by their condition.

## **Some Symptoms of ADHD**

- Inability to consistently apply concentration
- Easily distracted
- Difficulty following a train of the thought to its conclusion
- Difficulty sitting still, restlessness
- Easily overwhelmed
- Heightened anxiety responses
- Difficulty breaking down and/or organizing information, thoughts, or tasks
- Difficulty inhibiting impulses
- Feeling driven like a motor

## **When is ADHD considered a disabling condition?**

People often assume that the term "disability" applies only to those persons who have disabilities that are clearly evident, such as persons who use wheelchairs or who have hearing or visual impairments. Federal law, however, also applies to people who have disabilities that aren't visible, including persons who have ADHD. The issue is not what the condition is, but how it effects the person's functioning.

Legally, a person is considered to have a disability when he or she has a physical or mental impairment whose symptoms significantly restrict the condition, manner or duration in which he or she engages in one or more major life activities. Major life activities include reading, working, learning, hearing, speaking and attending to matters of personal care. This list is not exhaustive. A person's condition must be serious enough to substantially limit functioning in at least one major life activity.

Many of the symptoms of ADHD can impair an individual's ability to read, listen, attend, concentrate, communicate or otherwise perform in an academic setting. For example, a person with ADHD may have to expend inordinate amounts of energy to complete tasks that other students consider fairly simple, though tedious. Time is also a critical factor. A reading assignment that might take the average student two hours to complete may take a student with ADHD two to five times that amount of time.

## **A National Commitment**

Laws such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 formalize America's dedication to ensuring access for individuals who have disabilities. Access includes a range of experiences that make up daily life — from going to the supermarket to pursuing a post-secondary degree. In an academic setting, these laws ensure that students with disabilities are given the opportunity to overcome barriers to participation presented by their conditions.

## **A Balanced Approach**

Federal law makes it clear that, whenever reasonable, qualified students with disabilities should be offered the opportunity to participate fully in the postsecondary educational process. Students with disabilities must meet the same admission requirements as non-disabled students. An educational institution may not ask about a student's disability status during the application process, but students may choose to disclose their disability. While

the law prohibits discrimination against an individual solely because he or she has a disability, the law also makes it clear that individuals with disabilities must meet the essential elements of the curriculum applied to students without disabilities.

## **Accommodations**

Accommodations are steps faculty, staff, and school administrators take to help remove, whenever reasonable, barriers to participation in the educational experience presented by an individual's disability. Laws such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 guide us through the process of identifying reasonable accommodations.

### **Accommodations for students with ADHD may include:**

- Seating towards the front of the class to minimize distraction
- Materials provided in alternative formats to reinforce information presented
- Extended time for tests, quizzes and examinations
- Reduced-distraction locations for test taking
- Tests in alternative formats
- Early access to course syllabi and assignments
- Early registration (to help compensate for medication effects, i.e., early morning classes)
- Regular breaks during lecture and other classroom activities

*continued*

This list is not exhaustive, and not all students would be qualified for all accommodations.

## **Important Points to Remember**

The purpose of accommodations is to remove, as much as is reasonable, barriers to a student being able to participate in the school environment.

The accommodation must be reasonable. An accommodation that is unduly burdensome or would fundamentally alter the nature of a curriculum or program of instruction would not be considered reasonable. Keep in mind that a student's preferred accommodation may be provided, but a school is only required to provide a reasonable accommodation. Nevertheless, public institutions must give primary consideration to a student's preferred method of communication.

A person with a disability must request accommodations and may be required to provide documentation by a qualified professional. Accommodation requests should be supported by the documentation. The symptoms of ADHD, as well as other impairments, vary from individual to individual and thus the law requires that accommodations be developed on a case-by-case basis.

The timeliness and completeness of the documentation and students' ability to articulate their needs can play a major role in helping disability services personnel to determine what accommodations are appropriate and provide them in a timely fashion. Check with disability services personnel for a list of documentation

guidelines before documentation is presented. This will greatly enhance the accommodations process.

## **Resources**

### **Association on Higher Education And Disability (*AHEAD*)**

**Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)  
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Additional copies of this brochure are available from the Association on Higher Education And Disability (*AHEAD*).

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