



## **"Psychology Works" Fact Sheet: Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**

### **What is attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)?**

ADHD is characterized by developmentally inappropriate levels of inattention, impulsivity, and overactivity. Some people have problems with all three types of symptoms, while others have problems primarily with inattention. People with ADHD often have difficulty following instructions, keeping things organized, not interrupting others, acting without thinking, talking excessively, or feeling fidgety or restless. ADHD begins in childhood and many individuals continue to show ADHD symptoms into adulthood. ADHD occurs in 3 to 5% of elementary-school aged children and is more common in males than females.

In addition to the problems with inattention, impulsivity, and overactivity, individuals with ADHD often have academic or employment problems and difficulties in social interactions. ADHD often co-occurs with problems such as oppositional defiant or conduct disorder, learning disabilities, and depression or anxiety.

ADHD appears to have a biological basis, and in some cases, may be an inherited condition. However, the specific cause of the disorder is not known and it is likely that multiple causes or contributing factors exist.

There is no one test for ADHD. Instead, assessment requires gathering information from several sources, across multiple domains (e.g., home and school), using standardized measures, and careful consideration of other possible causes of the behaviour. Psychologists are well qualified to conduct such assessments.

### **What psychological treatments are used to treat ADHD?**

For most children, the best treatment for ADHD is a combination of behaviour therapy and medication. Behaviour therapy is particularly important in addressing social problems in individuals with ADHD and helps to prevent or treat the social and behaviour problems that can occur with ADHD.

Behaviour therapy involves many techniques and focuses on establishing clear rules for the individual's behaviour and providing frequent feedback in the form of rewards and mild punishments. Behaviour therapy also includes modeling, problem-solving, and social skills training. For children, behaviour therapy is often conducted both in the classroom and at home and parents and teachers are essential in implementing the therapy. For adults, cognitive-behavioural therapy focused on self-management may be useful.



## Where do I go for more information?

More information regarding effective treatments for ADHD can be found on the following website developed by the US National Institute of Health at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/adhd-listing.shtml>.

And in the following article: Pelham, Jr., W.E., & Fabiano, G.A. (2008). Evidence-based Psychosocial Treatments for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 37, 184-214.

**You can consult with a registered psychologist** to find out if psychological interventions might be of help to you. Provincial, territorial and some municipal associations of psychology often maintain referral services. For the names and coordinates of provincial and territorial associations of psychology, go to <http://www.cpa.ca/public/whatisapsychologist/PTassociations/>.

*This fact sheet has been prepared for the Canadian Psychological Association by Dr. Charlotte Johnston, Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia.*

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Your opinion matters! Please contact us with any questions or comments about any of the *Psychology Works* Fact Sheets: [factsheets@cpa.ca](mailto:factsheets@cpa.ca)

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