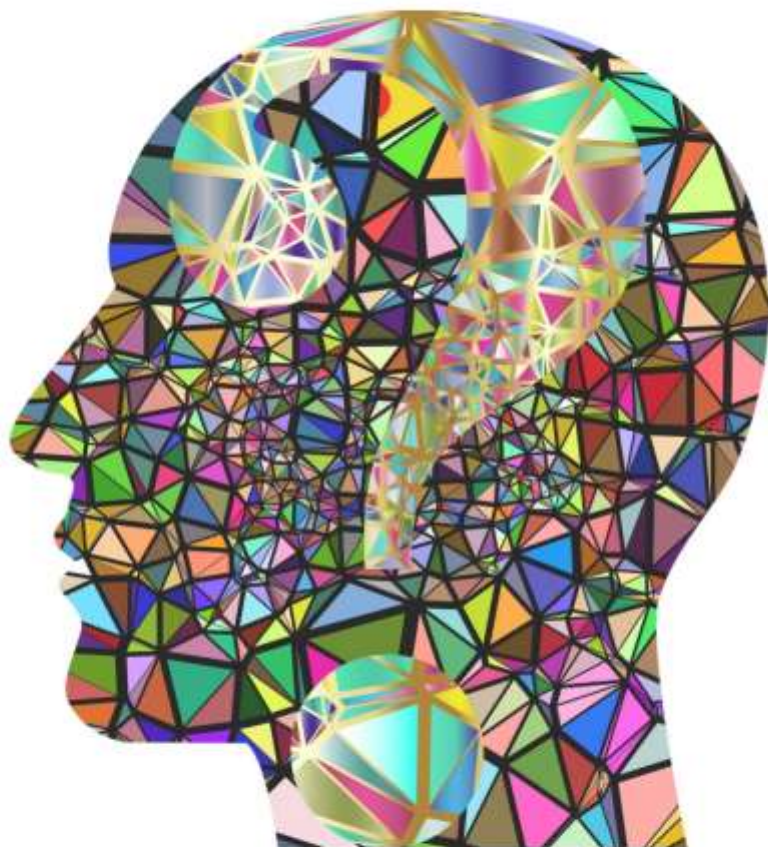


GET TO KNOW



UNFOCUSED
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ANGER
ACTIVE
ATTENTION
CONCENTRATION
DISORDER

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FRUSTRATION
DISTRACTION
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ACTIVE
HYPER
ATTENTION
DISORDER

HYPER CONCENTRATION
ATTENTION
DISTRACTION
ACTIVE
LEARNING
DISORDER

FRUSTRATION
LEARNING
DISORDER

CONCENTRATION
DISORDER
HYPER
ANGER
DAYDREAM
HYPER
ACTIVE
DISORDER

Background Information on ADHD

1. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition, which affects those parts of the brain which control attention, impulse and concentration (and in the process emotional regulation). It is thought to affect 5 to 7 %¹ of school age children. Boys are three times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than girls. Approximately 65% of children with ADHD continue into adulthood with ADHD (though the characteristics may change)². Most individuals with ADHD can learn strategies and skills which are sufficient to help them cope better in everyday life. Often this involves support from family members or colleagues.



Diagnostic Criteria for ADHD

ADHD is a condition described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as:

‘a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity/impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development.’

¹ Thomas R, Sanders S, Doust J, Beller E, Glasziou P. Prevalence of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Pediatrics*. 2015;135(4):e994-e1001. doi:10.1542/peds.2014-3482

² Faraone, Stephen & Biederman, Joseph & Mick, Eric. (2006). The age-dependent decline of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: A meta-analysis of follow-up studies. *Psychological medicine*. 36. 159-65. 10.1017/S003329170500471X.

ADHD Characteristics

Inattention:

- Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, at work, or with other activities.
- Often has trouble holding attention on tasks or play activities.
- Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.
- Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (e.g., loses focus, side-tracked).
- Often has trouble organizing tasks and activities.
- Often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to do tasks that require mental effort over a long period of time (such as schoolwork or homework).
- Often loses things necessary for tasks and activities (e.g. school materials, pencils, books, tools, wallets, keys, paperwork, eyeglasses, mobile telephones).
- Is often easily distracted
- Is often forgetful in daily activities.



Hyperactivity and Impulsivity:

- Often fidgets with or taps hands or feet, or squirms in seat.
- Often leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected.
- Often runs about or climbs in situations where it is not appropriate (adolescents or adults may be limited to feeling restless).
- Often unable to play or take part in leisure activities quietly.
- Is often “on the go” acting as if “driven by a motor”.
- Often talks excessively.
- Often blurts out an answer before a question has been completed.
- Often has trouble waiting their turn.
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations or games)



ADHD diagnostic criteria:

Many symptoms must have been present for at least 6 months and be disruptive and inappropriate for developmental level. symptoms were present before the age of 12. symptoms are present in two or more settings (such as at home, school or work; with friends or relatives; in leisure activities, etc).symptoms interfere with (or reduce the quality of) social, school, or work functioning. symptoms are not better explained by another mental disorder.

ADHD in Adults

ADHD often lasts into adulthood. Symptoms might look different at older ages. For example, in adults, hyperactivity may appear as extreme restlessness or wearing others out with their activity (at times this energy may be internalized and may be felt constantly but may not be apparent to others).

Inattentive ADHD in adults may look like procrastination, struggling to meet deadlines, seeming to not have heard instructions, or planning time needed to complete tasks, thus leading to struggles reaching deadlines.

Most frequent presentations of ADHD

Combined Presentation: symptoms of both criteria inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity

Predominantly Inattentive Presentation: symptoms of inattention, but not hyperactivity-impulsivity

Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation: symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity, but not inattention.

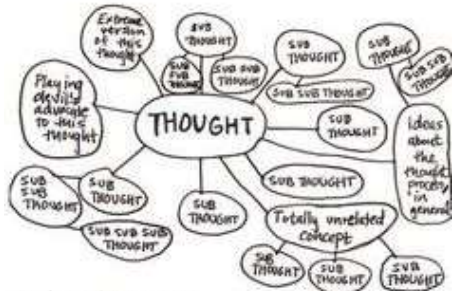
ADHD symptoms can change over time.

Rarely do I ever have a

THOUGHT

by itself.

It's more like:



so I usually end up
OVEREXPLAINING or BEING TOTALLY INARTICULATE

ADHD is a spectrum disorder: no one's ADHD is the same!

ADHD may change at different points in a person's life!

Symptoms and Diagnosis

Symptoms:

Typically, the symptoms of ADHD develop in childhood. However, many adults whose ADHD was undiagnosed as children may become aware of their symptoms as they get older. Being neurologically different and not understanding struggles growing up may lead to undiagnosed adults having more perceived or experienced trauma than average.³

Healthcare professionals use a clinical interview, in-depth personal history and specialised diagnostic checklist(s) of symptoms to officially diagnose ADHD.

Combined OR hyperactive/impulsive presentation

Persons with this type of ADHD are restless and cannot sit still and do one thing for very long. They are easily distracted and, because they find it so hard to pay attention, they may often be criticized for being careless and making too many mistakes at school/work. They appear not to listen when someone is talking to them, they find it hard to wait their turn and can be disruptive.

Inattentive presentation

Persons with inattentive type may be described as daydreamers. They may find it hard to start and finish tasks despite being capable of doing them. Procrastination (delaying starting a task) and following the task through to the end, as well as organization may be areas of great difficulty.

³ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12402-017-0241-x>

Can persons with ADHD pay attention? – YES!

Though inattention is a large aspect of ADHD, persons with ADHD **CAN** pay attention, it is more regulating attention – paying attention to what they are expected to at any given time that is hard. If a person with ADHD is interested in something, they can **hyperfocus** on it (pay a lot of attention to it).

Emotions and ADHD – feeling SOOO much!!

Though not mentioned in the DSM-5, research shows that emotions play a large part in ADHD. Persons with ADHD can be more sensitive. Regulating emotions, may also be difficult and may cause havoc in their lives. They may be prone to experiencing RSD (Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria) more and may be more sensitive to real or perceived rejection. Emotions then effect the ability to pay attention to what they need to attend to, and impulsivity plus strong emotions may lead to the person making (at times harmful) impulsive choices. ⁴

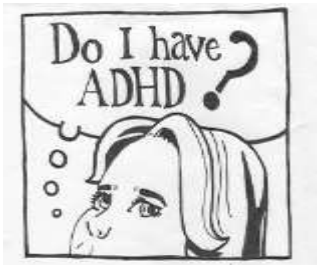
Executive Function – some skills develop later!

Persons with ADHD may develop some skills later than others. At times, a child with ADHD may develop the following skills much later than their peers (i.e. a 12-year-old may have the level of an 8-year-old in the following skills). Awareness of this is needed as this leads to understanding and allows us to support the person with ADHD better. These skills are:

Self-awareness, Inhibition, working memory (being able to hold things in your mind), Emotional Self-Regulation (controlling emotions), Self-motivation, Planning and Problem Solving.⁵

⁴ <https://www.additudemag.com/slideshows/adhd-emotions-understanding-intense-feelings/>

⁵ <https://www.additudemag.com/7-executive-function-deficits-linked-to-adhd/>



Some common thoughts: Am I lazy? Am I stupid? Why can't I focus? Why do I lose my temper so easily? What is wrong with me?

Diagnosis:

Diagnosis can be quite challenging because: -

- There is no physical test for ADHD (such as a blood test)
- All children may have some problems with self-control
- Other problems can result in behaviour similar to ADHD (e.g. language or hearing difficulties, dyslexia or major life disruptions or trauma (ACEs)).
- ADHD may exist in conjunction with other conditions whose symptoms can overlap and mask those of ADHD, (e.g. Asperger's syndrome, language disorder, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) Tourette's Syndrome amongst others).

In Malta, a **psychologist** or **psychiatrist** usually diagnoses ADHD after being referred to by a GP, the school or contacted by the parents / individuals themselves.

The healthcare professional will look for alarm signals: a child who under-performs or has to put in a lot more effort at school, despite having average or above-average intellect and no major specific learning disabilities.

- The child who has ADHD has behaviour problems which are considerably worse than would be expected despite adequate parenting skills
- They will exclude ADHD look-alikes, such as:
 - The normal active pre-school child, Intellectual disability, Hearing impairment, Autism, Epilepsy, Depression (although these may co-exist with ADHD)

- They may use:
 - Questionnaires (checklists) by parents and teachers or self -evaluations for adults
 - DSM-V or ICD-11 criteria
 - Tests which measure the length and type of mental process
 - Tests of attention and persistence
- *Parents (or loved ones), schools and healthcare professionals need to work **hand-in-hand** to help give a fuller picture of the individual. **Having an open mind, listening to and considering feedback from all parties is an important factor in their assessment.***
- Adults and family members must work closely with health specialists in order to plan and implement effective treatment plans.

ADHD classification

ADHD may be classified as mild, moderate and severe. The mild forms may be responsive to psycho-social interventions alone, however treatment needs to be monitored and reevaluated if necessary (especially if the individual is not reaching life goals and struggling or failing in school, work etc).

Comorbidities (co -existing conditions)

Although ADHD may exist on its own, other conditions often co-exist with ADHD (aprox 30 - 40% overlap).⁶

Such include:

- Anxiety/depression, OCD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), tics/Tourettes, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, bi-polar disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, sleep disorders, and so on.

Treatment

⁶ <https://chadd.org/about-adhd/co-occurring-conditions/>

People with ADHD can be very successful in life, however without proper intervention/treatment, ADHD may have serious consequences, which can include: ⁷

- Under- performance at school / early school dropouts
- Anxiety, Depression & a higher incidence of suicide
- Earlier experimentation with smoking, drinking, sexual activity and drug use, internet misuse.
- Problems with relationships, friendships, colleagues, a higher rate of family stress & teenage pregnancy
- Problems finding and keeping a job, (frequent change of jobs)
- More frequent driving accidents and fines.
- Prone to addictions (Substance use, gaming, gambling, internet use, eating disorders etc.)
- Delinquent behavior

Early identification and treatment is therefore very important to ensure the individual gets the right support to reach his / her potential. However, it is never too late for an assessment.

Research shows that the most effective way to treat ADHD is through a combination of different approaches: multi-modal⁸ – pharmaceutical, teaching and behavioural support can help the person to live a more functional life, having meaningful relationships and reducing family stress. Some treatment options are outlined below:

- **Psychiatry/psychology**
 - Psychiatrists and psychologists diagnose ADHD. Psychiatrists prescribe medication, psychologists may implement behavioural programmes, and support parents.
- **Medications**
 - Parents, in consultation with psychiatrists, should consider if they would like their child to try medication. Choice of medication depends on the person's profile, how the ADHD affects him and his/her needs.

⁷ <https://www.smartkidswithld.org/getting-help/adhd/untreated-adhd-lifelong-risks/>

⁸ CK, Conners & J, Epstein & J, March & A, Angold & KC, Wells & Klaric, John. (2001). Multi-modal treatment of ADHD in the MTA: An alternative outcome analysis. Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. 40. 159-67.

- **Behavioural Interventions**

- Family therapy focusing on management strategies
- Individual therapy focusing on changing behaviours (e.g. CBT, DBT)

- **Other Interventions**

- e.g. Cogmed – working memory training, The Alert Programme – sensory-based self-regulation training which supports attention

- **ADHD-focused** Parenting courses; peer support groups; adult ADHD coaching (*these services are offered by **ADHD Malta***)

Parenting support:

- Although children with ADHD have unique problems, many of the principles of parenting still apply. They particularly need *consistent discipline* and a *structured lifestyle*. However there are **differences in parenting a child with ADHD** and *parents need to learn how to tackle behavior and put supports and strategies in place*.
- Parents can attend the *parenting skills course for parents of children with ADHD* offered by **ADHD Malta**. Joining **ADHD Malta** and being involved in the support groups ensures their concerns and opinions are heard and they receive guidance.
- **ADHD Malta** organizes monthly meetings where parents can come together and discuss varying topics of interest.

- **School-based Interventions and Preventive Measures**

- Help with attention, planning, remembering and organization, supporting self-regulation, Counselling, support by LSE where needed.
- Teacher-assisted classroom strategies (eg: Special sitting arrangements, use of fidgets, duties, movement breaks etc)
- Flexible Time table.

- **Social Skills Training**

- Many persons with ADHD have difficulty socializing. Because they don't recognize the more subtle rules of communication, they frequently make mistakes and are teased by other children. In social skills training, children/young adults are taught in groups to think how their words and behaviour affect those around them.

- **Helpful options**
 - Exercise, Mindfulness meditation and hobbies are highly recommended to help manage ADHD symptoms, (Neurofeedback, Chiropractic have also been used). Sleep routines are also recommended.
- **Diet⁹** (A protein rich but balanced diet is recommended)
 - Food that is better for persons with ADHD includes:
 - ✓ Protein-rich food (e.g. beef, pork, fish, eggs, etc.)
 - ✓ Eating a more natural balanced diet
 - ✓ Multivitamins for picky eaters
 - Supplements that may support the individual with ADHD:
 - (speak to your chemist or doctor)
 - ✓ Zinc, iron and magnesium
 - ✓ Omega-3 fatty acids
 - ✓ Vitamin B
 - ✓ Ginkgo & Ginseng
 - ✓ Rhodiola Rosea
 - ✓ Melatonin for better sleep
 - It is advisable to try to avoid
 - ✗ Artificial dyes and preservatives
 - ✗ Foods that cause allergies (e.g. gluten, wheat, corn, soy) if there are food allergies

ADHD Adults

Adults also benefit from medication, CBT and DBT, Mindfulness, Exercise and coaching and finding a hobby that they can be passionate about. Finding the right job for the is important. Special attention to driving carefully is imperative.

ADHD Malta organizes monthly meetings for ADHD Adults too.

⁹ <https://www.additudemag.com/adhd-diet-nutrition-sugar/#:~:text=Foods%20rich%20in%20protein%20%E2%80%94lean,to%20communicate%20with%20each%20other.>

ADHD – In Summary

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a complex condition, with a 70-80% genetic link.¹⁰ As it runs in the family, early diagnosis is of optimal importance so that both the individual with ADHD, as well as their family finds the information and support needed to live a more fulfilling life. Whether a child, teen, adult it is never too late to seek a diagnosis and treatment for ADHD.

There are many famous people who have ADHD! (i.e. Adam Levine, Wil.i.am, Michael Phelps, Paris Hilton and many others) one should not be ashamed of having ADHD, we have many positive gifts to bring to society, we just need the right support.

Contact Us:

For further information and support contact ADHD Malta:

e-mail: ***adhdmalta@gmail.com***,

mobile: ***77297800***

website: ***adhdmalta.org.mt***

Facebook page: ***ADHDMalta***

Facebook support groups: ***ADHD Malta – Family, ADHD Malta – Adults, ADHD Malta – Youths, ADHD Malta for Professionals only.***

¹⁰ <https://psychcentral.com/lib/the-genetics-of-adhd/#:~:text=These%20studies%2C%20including%20family%20studies,mean%20estimate%20of%2076%20percent.>

References

¹ American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), 5th edition. Arlington, VA., American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

² <http://www.addiss.co.uk/allabout.htm>

Essential Reading/Watching

(Some of these books are available in ADHD Malta's library)

- **Books**

- 1-2-3-Magic – Phelan
- ADHD Living without brakes – Kutscher
- Driven to Distraction – Hallowell & Ratey
- Managing ADHD in schools – Russel Barkley
- You Mean I'm Not Lazy, Stupid or Crazy! - Kelly & Ramundo

- **Websites**

- adhdmalta.org.mt
- adhdeurope.eu
- additudemag.com
- chaad.org
- understood.org
-

- **Youtube channels / videos**

- How to ADHD
- Dr. Russel Barkley
- Understood.org
- Dr. Edward Hallowell
- TotallyADD
- ADHD Malta

ADHD Malta Membership

ADHD Malta (VO 41) is a Maltese registered and compliant NGO since 1996. Our aim is to support, educate and advocate for the needs of people and families with ADHD. Your one-time payment of 30 euro will enable you to become a lifetime member.

To become a member please send an email to adhdmalta@gmail.com or download the form from our website: www.adhdmalta.org.mt/membership/

Your membership will support the group and strengthen the voice of ADHD Malta both in Malta and Europe. ADHD Malta is a founding member of ADHD Europe.

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Become a Lifetime Member



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adhdmalta.org.mt



adhdmalta@gmail.com



+356 77297800

