

Finding the right treatment for ADHD

From misconceptions about symptoms to stereotypes about drugs like Adderall, there's a lot to parse out when getting treatment for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects attention, impulse control and activity levels. ADHD is seen in all ages and can overlap with other issues like depression and anxiety.

"ADHD is different from lack of interest or just not paying attention. It includes emotional dysregulation, chronic impatience, restlessness and constant fidgeting. There's difficulty managing, planning and organizing things," says [Maghav Sharma, MD](#), an OSF HealthCare psychiatrist. "That leads to difficulties at home or work. It can cause relationship difficulties or difficulties with bosses. Maybe the person is not completing work on time or are impatient with the result of the work."

"We see symptoms of hyperactivity mostly in kids. They'll run around their classroom. It's a common reason why teachers and parents send their students to the doctor to get ADHD treatment," Dr. Sharma adds. "In adults, that anxiousness and restlessness is not outwardly projected. It's more inside. A person can feel overwhelmed. They are fidgety, restless or on edge."

All this is why it's important to get a treatment plan tailored to your needs. Seeing someone like Dr. Sharma would be a good first step. He says therapy can teach skills, like how to plan and be organized, that can help cope with everyday ADHD issues and, at the same time, help if there are other issues present, like depression. For example, if ADHD is causing you to procrastinate on work projects, you could feel anxious about getting in trouble or sad about missed opportunities to move up the corporate ladder.

"We do quite often see people with symptoms of depression or anxiety, but they have underlying ADHD as well," Dr. Sharma says. "It's hard to tell sometimes which symptoms are related to anxiety and which are related to ADHD. So we tend to treat the conditions together. Treatment for anxiety and depression can sometimes alleviate the symptoms of ADHD."

ADHD treatment "never should be just medication," Dr. Sharma says. But if ADHD is making daily life difficult, medication can be paired "thoughtfully" with other treatment, he says. Stimulants like Adderall and Vyvanse are often starting options for adults. For kids, health care providers might try methylphenidate (Ritalin is a common brand name). A provider could change your medication if side effects are a problem. They could try a non-stimulant like clonidine or guanfacine.

Lifestyle changes also play a big role in ADHD management, Dr. Sharma says. Sticking to a routine – everything from when you sleep to when you leave for work – can help. Exercise, staying hydrated, eating a healthy diet and getting outside to pursue hobbies or be around others can also help your mood.

Learn more about keeping your mind healthy on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).