



## Did you know that... Psychology works for Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

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### What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?

**ADHD is characterized by** developmentally inappropriate levels of inattention, impulsivity, and/or overactivity. People with ADHD often have difficulty following instructions, keeping things organized, not interrupting others, acting without thinking, talking excessively, or feeling fidgety or restless. Some people have problems with all three types of symptoms, while other people have problems primarily with inattention or with impulsivity and overactivity.

**ADHD usually begins** in childhood while 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 disruptive behaviour (including 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, 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?

**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.

**More information** regarding effective treatments for ADHD can be found in a consensus statement on the Diagnosis and Treatment of ADHD developed by the US National Institutes of Health ([www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov)) and in the following article: The MTA Cooperative Group (1999). A 14-month randomized clinical trial of treatment strategies for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 56, 1073-1086.

**Consultation with or referral to a registered psychologist** can help guide you as to the use of these therapies. For a list of psychologists in your area, <http://www.cpa.ca/Psychologist/>.

*This summary has been created for the Clinical Section of the Canadian Psychological Association by Dr. Charlotte Johnston, Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia.*

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