

Factsheet – ADHD

What is ADHD?

ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) is a condition that affects a person's concentration and activity levels. People with ADHD can find it harder to concentrate, seem restless, and act impulsively. Conversely, people with ADHD can also hyperfocus on tasks. They can also often have strong problem-solving skills and 3D visual skills.

The name can be misleading. There is no lack of attention, more a difficulty in regulating attention. Hyperactivity is also not present in all cases.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) divides ADHD into three types:

- Predominantly inattentive (20-30 per cent) – often described as 'daydreamers.'
- Predominantly hyperactive-impulsive (15 per cent) – often impulsive and 'on the go.'
- Combined (50-75 per cent) – a mixture of both of the above.

The UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) estimates that ADHD affects 3-4 percent of adults in the UK.

Common strengths.

Below are some commonly associated strengths. Nobody will experience them all:

- Empathy
- Ability to hyperfocus (this can also be a challenge especially when changing to a different task)
- Creativity
- Problem-solving
- Visual reasoning skills
- Communication skills
- Adaptability – for example, often excel in emergency work
- Spontaneity
- Energy
- Resilience and tenacity.

Potential impact on work.

Below are the criteria used by the DSM-V for each type. For this factsheet, examples of how these may be seen in the workplace have been added. No one person will experience all the criteria below.

- Predominantly inattentive
- Lack of attention to detail – for example, overlooks or misses details, work is inaccurate.
- Shorter attention span – for example, has difficulty remaining focused during meetings, and conversations.
- Can seem not to listen when spoken to directly and may seem distracted in conversation.
- May not complete tasks or projects – for example, starts tasks but quickly loses focus, is easily distracted.
- Difficulty organising tasks and activities – for example:
- Difficulty managing sequential tasks
- Difficulty keeping materials and belongings in order
- Messy, disorganised work
- Poor time management
- Fails to meet deadlines.
- Avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (for example, preparing reports, completing forms, reviewing lengthy papers) especially if they are not interested in the topic.
- Loses things necessary for tasks or activities – for example, paperwork, and keys.
- Easily distracted by stimuli (including own thoughts)
- Forgetful in daily activities – for example, doing chores, running errands, returning calls, and keeping appointments.
- Predominantly hyperactive-impulsive
- Often fidgets with or taps hands or feet or squirms in seat.
- Often leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected – for example, getting up in the middle of meetings.
- Finds it harder to stay quiet when this is usually expected.
- Finds it harder to stay still for extended time, such as in long meetings. Others may experience this as being restless or difficult to keep up with.
- Talks excessively.
- Many seem to speak when it isn't their turn – for example, completes people's sentences or changes the subject mid-conversation.
- Often has difficulty waiting their turn – for example, while waiting in line.
- May interrupt while others are talking or engage in conversations around them.

Workplace adjustments for ADHD.

Everyone with ADHD experiences their condition differently. The right adjustments will depend on the individual, their role, their team and the wider organisation. Work with the individual, their manager and other experts such as HR and Access to Work to identify and put adjustments in place that work for the individual in their role.

Common adjustments for people with ADHD include:

- Giving the employee windows of time to start and finish (for example, between 8:45-9:15am).
- Providing quiet, solitary places to work without disturbance.
- Some people may prefer to use headphones or ear plugs to reduce disturbances and distractions.
- Allowing them to customise their workspace with reminders and visual cues about their work.
- Providing devices that provide reminders, such as smartphones.
- Letting the employee turn off work-related notifications like emails, Teams chats and work calls for set periods when they need to concentrate.
- Some people find fidgeting, in a non-disruptive way, during conversations and meetings helps them focus.

Managing ADHD.

ADHD medication

ADHD can often be well managed by medication. There are two main types:

- Stimulants – for example, methylphenidates and amphetamines
- Non-stimulants.

These medications can often work very well but finding the best medication and dose can take time. The medication is always started at the lowest dose and requires regular medical review.

Medication is not suitable for everyone, and some people can experience serious side effects.

These medications will come up as positive in drug and alcohol testing, and provision for this should be made.

The medications are strictly controlled in most countries and still banned in others. Where they are permitted, a safe place, such as a lockable desk drawer or locker, should be made available.

Non-medical approaches.

Many people with ADHD choose not to take medication or find it unsuitable due to complex side-effects.

There are non-medical approaches that can help people with ADHD.

- Therapy – This can help cope with the symptoms of ADHD and the negative feelings associated with them. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy has more information [on its website](#).
- Diet – [The NHS recommends](#) eating a healthy diet to help manage ADHD. People with ADHD can also notice that some foods worsen their symptoms. Talking to a dietician can determine whether their diet affects their ADHD.

Further information.

ADHD Foundation

ADHD Foundation is a UK charity that provides advice and support to people with ADHD, including in the workplace.

adhdfoundation.org.uk.

ADHD UK.

ADHD UK is a charity that provides advice and support for people with ADHD, including in the workplace.

adhduk.co.uk.

Lexxic.

Lexxic is a specialist psychological consultancy that can advise on supporting neurodivergent employees.

lexxic.com.

Genius Within.

Genius Within has a team of neurodiversity specialists that can support employers and individuals.

geniuswithin.org.

Access to Work.

Access to Work is a UK Government initiative that aims to support people with disabilities get jobs and stay in work. It does this by providing employers with grants for specific support for a named disabled employee or candidate. Access to Work does not arrange or supply the support directly.

Access to Work also conducts workplace assessments as part of this process, to work out what barriers the employee or candidate is facing and what will help address them.

Access to Work also offers a Mental Health Support Service.

gov.uk/access-to-work.