

ADHD

This leaflet has been given to you because you have been diagnosed with ADHD, or because you are suspected of suffering from ADHD.

[If you would rather read this information on your phone, you can go to www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/adhd](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/adhd) (in Danish) or scan the QR code with your phone.



What is ADHD?

ADHD is short for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and is a hereditary and congenital brain variant which means that you have difficulty sorting through the many impressions you are exposed to and staying focused. The disorder is caused by a disturbance in the areas of the brain that are responsible for your attention, bodily activity levels and control over impulsive actions.

ADHD is a so-called spectrum disorder because it comes in different degrees.

ADHD is also a motivational disorder because it can be almost impossible for you to focus for any length of time on something you are not motivated for and find boring. This includes routine tasks such as cooking or a work task that you find uninteresting.

However, you are actually able to concentrate more intensely than a non-ADHD brain on something that excites you. This is called hyperfocus.

Some find their own strategies for coping with everyday life, while for others their quality of life is so reduced that they need professional help and may have

to take both ADHD medication and other types of medication for mental illness.

ADHD is for life, but if you get the right help, many people with ADHD will be able to lead a more stable and fulfilling life.

How many people suffer from ADHD?

- Up to 5% of the population (perhaps more) are on the ADHD spectrum.
- 85% due to ADHD, 10% due to ADD.
- Eight out of ten people suffering from ADHD have a parent with ADHD.

What happens in the brain?

People are generally described as having either a 'normal brain' (neurotypical) or a 'divergent brain' (neuroatypical). Scans have detected changes in several areas of the brain of individuals with ADHD, for example in the area responsible for planning, impulse control and attention.

If you suffer from ADHD, your dopamine and norepinephrine levels are lower than normal. Dopamine plays a vital role in the brain's pleasure and reward systems. So by increasing dopamine levels through medication, it becomes easier to control your impulses and desires for seeking out excitement, for example.

The same goes for food or sex. You may also tend to overeat as you get a slight kick out of eating due to the release of dopamine in the brain.

What does ADHD feel like?

For some people, having ADHD feels like driving along an eight-lane motorway of thoughts, where all the lanes are equally important. Therefore, you may come across as being a bit absent-minded because you may only hear half of what is being said. This can be a big problem, for example, in a study environment, where lots of things tend to be happening all at once, and which it is difficult for you to sort through.

It may also be difficult for you to stay focused during long meetings at work or in a long conversation. At the same time, due to feelings of restlessness in your

body, you may need to move around or get up in the middle of the conversation.

Symptoms of ADHD

- Attention difficulties
- Hyperactivity/restlessness
- Impulsivity
- Affected short-term memory
- Unrealistic sense of time
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Racing thoughts
- Disturbed sleep
- Addictions (drugs, alcohol and behaviour).

As a rule, the symptoms must have been present before the age of 12, as you are born with ADHD.

Very hyperactive children – mostly boys – tend to be diagnosed already in primary school.

ADHD in adults looks different. While hyperactivity is quite evident in children, adults have typically learnt to dampen any overt hyperactivity symptoms, but still experience inner turmoil, restlessness and tension. Coping mechanisms may include fidgeting, biting your finger nails or tapping your feet.

What is ADD?

ADHD and ADD are essentially the same disorder, but with ADD, you have less 'H' or hyperactivity. You still suffer from attention deficit disorder and may have a hard time finding the motivation to do boring tasks.

More girls than boys are diagnosed with ADD. However, sometimes boys with ADD go undetected because they hide the condition by being very quiet. Many will therefore only be diagnosed as adults.

How many people suffer from ADD?

- 85% have ADHD.
- 10% have ADD.
- The remaining 5% are predominantly hyperactive.

Course of the disorder

Many people with mild ADHD do just fine as long as they only have to think about themselves and keep to their own routines. However, the increasing demands of adult life can feel challenging. For example, starting studying, leaving home or getting a job and starting a family, which means that all of a sudden you need to keep track of messages from teachers, children's homework, lunch packs, digital ID apps like MitID, birthdays etc.

If you have problems creating structure and sorting through impressions and tasks, life can feel completely overwhelming. That is why it is important that you get the help and support you need.

You can also learn to introduce habits and structures into your daily life that will make it easier for you to concentrate, for example when in meetings, and by having a system for where you put your keys and wallet, you do not need to spend time and energy looking for them.

Girls and women with ADHD

Girls are better at devising strategies, which means that – unlike boys – they do not end up running around and getting into fights, which also means that their problems are less visible. They may, for example, be able to do a university degree, but not without it consuming all their energy.

When women seek help, it is usually because they repeatedly develop depression, anxiety symptoms, self-harm or eating disorders. The risk is that you overlook the fact that they also suffer from ADHD.

As a woman, if you seek help for depression, it is therefore important that you remember to tell your doctor of any lifelong challenges that may need taking care of and which may be due to ADHD.

Hormonal factors

Hormones also play a role for women suffering from ADHD. Many women struggle more with managing their emotions and experience more cognitive difficulties in the week leading up to their period.

This is best explained by the fact that the combination of high progesterone and low oestrogen (female sex hormones) causes the level of dopamine in the brain to decrease. It may therefore be an idea to increase your ADHD medication in the week leading up to your period.

Other mental illnesses

Some people with ADHD are first diagnosed with bipolar disorder or borderline disorder because they have difficulty controlling their emotions. They may find that their mood can change dramatically and many times in the course of the day, which is also a symptom of borderline disorder.

- Up to 80% of individuals with ADHD develop other mental disorders.
- About 30% of individuals with ADHD also suffer from autism.
- Up to 25% suffer from depression.

Increase in ADHD diagnosis

Many people with ADHD are never diagnosed. However, it is a good idea to seek help if you feel that your quality of life is reduced – even if you may have to wait for an appointment for a long time.

There has been an increase in the number of people diagnosed with ADHD, and you may have to be diagnosed in order to get the right help – for example, in connection with your studies or training, or you may be entitled to compensation for reduced working hours.

For many, being diagnosed comes as a relief as they finally realise that it is not their own fault, but that ADHD is hereditary and that you are born with ADHD.

The diagnosis is also a chance to get medication that can help you feel better.

Our understanding of ADHD is changing

Today, children are tested and examined at kindergarten age to find out if they fall outside the norm. This also applies to adults, who are faced with ever-increasing demands for being extremely structured, focused and purposeful in everything you do.

Fortunately, awareness is increasing in society of the positive sides of ADHD, and in Denmark many people are coming forward to talk about living with ADHD.

Some people talk about ADHD as a special superpower or about being particularly creative because you have ADHD. This is not necessarily so and depends a lot on how you organise your life.

For example, in some industries, it can be positive to get a lot of ideas and be adaptable if you work with someone who can finish what you set in motion.

Or you may be able to organise your family life so that your partner takes care of the routine tasks that you yourself find difficult. But for this to happen, you need to talk about it and agree on how best to distribute the roles.

More knowledge and counselling

Psykiatriguiden – overview for patients and relatives

In Psykiatriguiden, we have gathered all relevant information about mental illnesses, types of treatment and treatment programmes offered by the mental health services of the Capital Region of Denmark. You can also read about being a relative of a person with a mental illness.

[Find Psykiatriguiden \(in Danish\) at www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/psykiatriguiden](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/psykiatriguiden) or by scanning the QR code with your phone.



Living with mental illness

[You can find specific tools designed to help you in your everyday life at www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/hverdagen](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/hverdagen) (in Danish) or by scanning the QR code with your phone.



Counselling from PsykInfo

At PsykInfo in the Capital Region of Denmark, nurses with experience from the mental health services offer telephone or personal counselling to both patients and their relatives. [You can read more at www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/Psykinfo](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/Psykinfo) (in Danish) or call 38 64 13 00. You can also scan the QR code with your phone.

