

CHILDREN AND ADHD

ADHD
samtökin

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THE BASICS OF ADHD

ADHD is an acronym for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. This disorder manifests itself in a deficit/impairment of attention, increased impulsivity and hyperactivity. The causes of ADHD are biological and stem from disruptions in the neurotransmittersystem of the brain in areas that are important for controlling both human behaviour and attention.

In the past ADHD was called developmental syndrome but today it is internationally defined as ADHD.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF ADHD

There are three different types of ADHD:

ADHD — with dominant attention deficit.

ADHD — with dominant increased impulsivity and hyperactivity.

ADHD — mixed type with attention deficit, increased impulsivity and hyperactivity.



WHERE DOES ADHD COME FROM?

In the past specialists thought that circumstances and environment during childhood had an impact on the development of ADHD. Today scientific results show that heredity is by far the most dominant factor. This can be seen for instance when many individuals in the same family have ADHD (even though that is not always so).

ACCORDING TO RESEARCH THE GREATEST SINGLE FACTOR CAUSING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADHD IS:

- Heredity (60-80% is based on heredity).
- Circumstances during pregnancy (infections, using alcohol and/or drugs)
- Premature birth
- Brain injury during the first year of life
- Diseases or accidents
- Other developmental disorders

Taking an example of the Icelandic boy Gutti, it is very likely that he has received genes that are causing difficulties for him. His parents do not necessarily have ADHD themselves, but they may recognize the symptoms from other family members.

There is no proof that children that are raised in difficult circumstances or who experience insecurity during childhood are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD if there are not underlying genetic causes.

The disruptions in the brain have not yet been fully explained, but research indicates that ADHD mainly impacts brain centers that focus on and control impulsivity, attention/concentration span and organizational abilities.



HOW MANY CHILDREN HAVE ADHD?

International research shows that Gutti is not the only one with ADHD. Around 7-10% of all schoolchildren have ADHD, both hyperactivity and attention problems, i.e. there is at least one Gutti in each classroom.

WHAT CHARACTERIZES ADHD?

Attention deficit, impulsiveness and hyperactivity are the main ways in which ADHD manifests itself, independently from gender and age. It is however common that girls with ADHD are diagnosed around 5 years later than boys for instance as girls do not seem to show hyperactivity as clearly as boys. Many girls do therefore battle with ADHD in silence, which can cause many faceted difficulties. ADHD samtökin have published a brochure called "Girls and ADHD" where you can learn more about how the disorder manifests itself and which coping strategies can be used.

A child has to have more than one symptom in order to be diagnosed with ADHD, i.e. hyperactivity, attention deficit or impulsivity.

At least six symptoms showing both hyperactivity and attention deficit have to be present and they have to have been present for at least six months. These symptoms must be out of sync with the age and the developmental status of the child in general.

Examples of symptoms:

- Attention deficit regarding details, errors due to rashness in school, work or during other activities.
- Difficulties in maintaining attention during work and play.
- Seem not to listen when spoken to.
- Usually do not follow instructions and have difficulties in completing homework. Also difficulties with chores in the home and assignments at work. This is not due to stubbornness or difficulty understanding instructions.
- Have difficulty in organizing assignments and schedules.
- Are very easily diverted by interruptions from the outside.
- Avoid or do not want to solve difficult home or work assignments.
- Lose and forget necessary things, such as toys, books or writing implements.
- Are forgetful in daily life.



Hyperactive Gutti

- Moves hands and feet excessively, moves rapidly and wiggles in the chair.
- Often leaves places where he is supposed to be during certain activities, such as classrooms, concerts etc.
- Has difficulty in playing and maintaining sports or other leisure activities.
- Is always doing something and has difficulties sitting still.
- Often speaks very much.

Impulsive Gutti

- Often interrupts others in their speech.
- Has difficulty in waiting his turn.
- Interrupts others or crosses limits for instance by interrupting the conversations, play or games of others.



OTHER THINGS CHARACTERISTIC OF ADHD

- The symptoms such as hyperactivity, attention deficit, and impulsivity have to have been noted at an early age.
- The symptoms have to be evident both in the home and at school (at least two areas).
- Direct evidence has to be available showing that the symptoms cause real disadvantage and difficulties socially, educationally or in other activities.
- The symptoms are not evidence of developmental disorders, schizophrenia or other mental diseases. It has to be clear that there are no mental disorders are present that can explain the symptoms.

How is the diagnosis carried out?

How can you determine that a boy like Gutti is normal or whether he sticks out from the crowd? In order for an ADHD diagnosis to take place, the symptoms have to cause difficulties in daily life and to impact his environment. It is however important to realise that the symptoms are expressed individually and can be different in different people, also in children with ADHD.

Interdisciplinary assessment

No blood samples, specific research results or individual psychological tests can provide an ADHD diagnosis. The diagnosis of a kid like Gutti is carried out by an interdisciplinary assessment along with interviews with his parents and with himself. Also a medical examination is necessary, where his health is examined, such as his ability to move himself, social adeptness and his attention span, and this medical examination along with an interdisciplinary assessment determines whether the child could have some kind of disease that could explain the situation.

A psychological analysis is performed, of his ability to focus, his ability to solve problems and his ability to study along with social ability, memory and understanding.

The research also shows whether any problems occurred during pregnancy or during birth that could explain the symptoms. Gutti's symptoms are described from birth to this day, and then the diagnosis is made with support from medical history, family history and information from the school system.



TREATMENT AND ADHD

ADHD does not only impact the child but the whole family. Gutti's difficulties do not only impact him but also his living, daily environment.

In order for treatment for ADHD to be of any value we have to understand Gutti's situation. What he finds difficult to do and how his environment can help him. When he finds victory in his daily life his stress diminishes and this helps him deal with the difficulties he encounters in ordinary circumstances.

The need for praise

Everyone needs praise, but children with ADHD literally thrive on praise! A child with ADHD is born with a disorder that requires it to meet many challenges on a daily basis. Children with ADHD repeatedly get into circumstances that

have a negative impact on their self-esteem. Therefore it is important that all those who deal with the child understand its circumstances and are prepared to support the child.

Daily organization

A well organized day is good for a boy like Gutti, i.e. clear and simple rules, defined demarcations and defined habits. For instance food and sleep always at the same time. This makes it easier to deal with the difficulties, and the kid feels more loved.

Children with ADHD are in increased danger of developing learning difficulties, experiencing bullying and social difficulties. A positive attitude and understanding on behalf of the teacher are vital and it has to be accepted that the behaviour is not just being naughty or not having been brought up properly.

A boy like Gutti for instance has problems with listening and maintaining his attention. He is easily distracted by stimuli from the environment and therefore it is good to let him sit close to the teacher, where he can sit quietly, without interruptions, and where the teacher can help him easily. The schoolday has to be well organized so that Gutti always knows what comes next. When the teacher says something to the class, he may have to repeat the instructions for Gutti.

Smaller groups with increased support can be of help for children with ADHD as they often have difficulties concentrating for long periods at a time.

Cooperation and support

Good cooperation between parents, the school and others involved with the life of the child creates the best conditions for support. The right

support will provide the child's best chance of overcoming difficulties and building on strengths.

Pharmaceutical treatment

If cooperation and support is not enough medicines may have to be used. The parents, the child and the school have to be well informed about the medicine, how it works, possible side effects, and how these medications can affect other medications that are taken simultaneously.

Research has shown that 70-80% of children with ADHD use medications with good results. Such medication is prescribed to children with ADHD by specialists.

There is very little research on children's experience of these medications, or for that matter any medications. The research available indicates that the children themselves feel that the medicine is working and they want to continue taking them.

The most common side effects of ADHD-medication are lack of appetite, difficulties sleeping and headaches.



ARE THERE MORE CHILDREN WITH ADHD THAN EVER BEFORE?

Many different factors determine whether children are diagnosed with ADHD. One of the most important factors is whether the symptoms disrupt the child's social life or studies or affect its attention span.

An education system that require students to be partly responsible for their own studies and one where the number of individuals in the classroom is always increasing causes increasing demands on and problems for children with ADHD.

Increased demands for skills and ability to process increasing amounts of information can be difficult for children with ADHD. Always having to change assignments demands that children can shift their focus from one assignment to the next and be active in different contexts. At the same time families with children experience more stress and time pressure than before and therefore their capacity for supporting their children is diminished.

Doctors, psychologists and teachers now possess increased knowledge and understanding of ADHD. There is also less stigma today than before on seeking treatment and treatment options are now more varied.

These may be some of the reasons why today more kids are diagnosed with ADHD than before. Discussions are always beneficial but they do not help children that are facing ADHD and need help. What the children need the most is understanding and support, not just empty words.



DID YOU KNOW ...

Children with ADHD can also become very sad when they have done something wrong once again.

Children with ADHD can focus on things they are very keen on.

That support and medication can help children with ADHD.



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