

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

What is attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)?

ADHD involves a pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity that interferes with daily activities. People with ADHD experience impatience and impulsive behaviors, and have difficulty paying attention. For some, the symptoms of ADHD may continue and even worsen with prolonged abstinence, making recovery more difficult. Treatment options are available for these people.

What are the symptoms of ADHD?

A person with ADHD may experience all or some of the following symptoms, in varying severity:

- making careless mistakes in school or work
- difficulty paying attention to tasks or activities
- not listening when spoken to
- being easily distracted
- forgetfulness in daily activities
- short attention span
- difficulty structuring time or organizing
- avoidance of activities that require sustained mental work
- fidgeting or squirming
- difficulty engaging with others
- feelings of restlessness
- talking excessively
- interrupting or intruding

Can ADHD affect your recovery?

People with alcohol and other drug use disorders often suffer from co-occurring mental health issues. If these issues go untreated, you may experience more difficulty in recovery.

Impatience, impulsivity, and poor judgment are often problems among alcoholics and addicts. Sometimes these problems improve in recovery. Other people struggle with them throughout their lives. The use of alcohol or other drugs, or

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withdrawal from them, can cause symptoms that mimic ADHD. In these cases, symptoms may be substance induced, and they will disappear with prolonged abstinence.

Others, whose symptoms do not improve with abstinence, may be diagnosed with clinical ADHD. If this is your situation, there are things that can be done to manage ADHD so it doesn't affect your recovery from chemical use. The first step in managing it is to better understand the disorder.

Is there a link between ADHD and addiction?

The relationship appears to be especially complex. Some studies show a higher rate of ADHD among substance abusers. Studies also report that people with ADHD may develop substance use problems at an early age. They may also experience a variety of other problems, such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and obsessive-compulsive behaviors.

How is ADHD diagnosed?

Careful diagnosis is critical. If you experience the symptoms of ADHD, it is important that you have an assessment by a mental health professional who also has expertise in substance use disorders.

What treatments are available for ADHD?

Typically ADHD in alcoholics and addicts is treated with therapy that includes both behavioral interventions and medication. Some of these medications can be addictive and harmful to recovering alcoholics and addicts, but there are several safe, effective, and nonaddictive medications available to treat it. Discuss medications and other treatment options with a mental health professional with expertise in addiction. The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and your sponsor can also help you learn to live with ADHD.

Web resources

There are many resources out there. The websites for the following organizations were chosen for their usefulness and user friendliness.

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

NIMH is a U.S. government organization, an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services, dedicated to research and education in the field of mental

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health. Its website is a great resource of information about specific mental health disorders including ADHD, depression, and anxiety disorders.

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) This national nonprofit organization provides education, advocacy, and support for people with ADHD. In addition to an informative website, CHADD also publishes a variety of printed materials to keep members and professionals current on research advances, medications, and treatments affecting those with ADHD.

Learning Disabilities Association of America

If you want to learn more about ADHD and how it can affect learning, this website provides valuable resources.