

What is ADHD/ADD?

Between 3% and 5% of children may have Attention Deficit Disorder. Numbers in adults and HE have not been accurately surveyed in the UK, but such students are beginning to apply to universities just as dyslexic people did 15 years ago.

ADHD has three key indicators: inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsivity. Examples of behaviours under these headings are:

Inattentiveness

- Becoming rapidly bored with a task
- Lack of planning and organisation
- Easily distracted
- Shifting from one incomplete activity to another
- Losing property or forgetting equipment

Hyperactivity

- Restless and fidgety
- Frequent talking
- Doing several things at once
- Attracted by highly stimulating activities

Impulsivity

- Interrupting others
- Difficulty awaiting turn in a group
- Inappropriate comments

ADHD is a neurological condition. Students with ADHD will have exhibited these behaviours over many years, and these behaviours probably have harmed their social relationships and educational achievement. They may well be depressed and anxious, and drawn to alcohol or substance abuse as a way of dulling the problems.

ADHD is part of what might be called 'neurodiversity'. Its indicators can overlap with

dyslexia in respect of lack of concentration and difficulties with personal organisation.

Potential advantages of this kind of brain:

- Ability to see the 'big picture'
- Being creative and inventive
- Ability to focus intensely for a time
- High levels of energy
- Risk-taking can lead to making discoveries
- Being intuitive

Support for students with ADHD should combine educational, psychological and sometimes medical strategies. Medication such as methylphenidate (Ritalin) and dexamphetamine (Dexedrine) can help. Cognitive behavioural counselling is also useful, as is the approach known as 'life coaching'. A key issue is persuading the student to accept that help is needed.

Full reference can be found in [Disability Learning Support Specific Learning Difficulties \(SpLDs\) booklet](#)

Useful link

[Further information: NHS ADHD](#)

Approaches to a student with ADHD might include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure you have their attention before giving an instruction.• Use frequent eye contact.• Identify times and places where they are more focused.• Emphasise critical pieces of information.• Give frequent reminders about how much time is left in tests and exams.• Consider seating arrangements• Integrate stretch breaks or relaxation exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on tangible, short-term steps rather than long-term plans• Agree on a concrete starting point• Provide structure and routine• Facilitate sound recording of lectures and other meetings• Offer copies of OHTs• Suggest an hourly alarm on a phone or watch to keep track of time• Suggest colour-coded ring binders / notebooks for each subject area• Suggest daily reminder schedules or 'To do' lists but highlight or star the most important tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adopt the re-framing technique, ie acknowledgement of ADHD by the student, but also understanding themselves as a capable, competent individual.• Give positive feedback where possible.• Use assertive and positive communication• Encourage positive self talk and internal locus of control.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to see the 'big picture' • Creativity and inventiveness. • A 'risk-taking' approach which can produce important discoveries. • Ability to process information and make broader observations. • High levels of energy. • Good negotiation skills. • Intuitiveness. • Ability to hyper-focus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set ground rules, such as agreement on the type of feedback the student wants. • Negotiate contracts. • Ask succinct questions to help the student stop and reflect. • Encourage problem-solving skills. • Provide encouragement. • Monitor via phone calls or email.
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The student should be encouraged to take ownership of dealing with aspects of ADHD that bring him into conflict with others. These suggestions for a student are taken from Weinstein C (1994) 'Cognitive remediation strategies' J of Psychotherapy Practice and Research 3(1):44-57 :

- When necessary, ask the tutor to repeat instructions rather than guessing.
- Break large assignments into small tasks. Set a deadline for each task and reward yourself as you complete each one.
- Each day, make a list of what you need to do. Plan the best order for doing each task. Then make a schedule for doing them. Use a calendar or daily planner to keep yourself on track.
- Work in a quiet area. Do one thing at a time. Give yourself short breaks.

- Write things you need to remember in a notebook with dividers. Write different kinds of information like assignments and appointments in different sections. Keep the book with you all the time.
- Post reminder notes to yourself about things you need to do. Stick them to the bathroom mirror, fridge etc.
- Store similar things together, eg computer disks, different types of paper.
- Create a routine. Get yourself ready for university at the same time, in the same way, every day
- Exercise, eat a balanced diet and get enough sleep.

The hardest item for a student will probably be the fourth, because ADHD people are drawn to high-stimulus activities and attempted multi-tasking. Taking ownership of the issue has to start with acknowledging that it is a problem.

With special acknowledgement and thanks to David Pollack, main contact for [BrainHE](#).

[All good practice guidelines are within the framework of the equality act 2010.](#)