



ADHD

What you
need to know

If you or someone you care about has been diagnosed with ADHD, you probably have many questions. We hope to answer most of them, and direct you to resources that can help answer the rest.





Understanding ADHD

We've developed this guide to help you better understand ADHD: what it looks like, what the treatment options are, and what you and your family can do to live life to the fullest.

- What is ADHD? — Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a developmental brain condition that affects attention, although some people also have impulsivity and hyperactivity. Symptoms include challenges with concentration, memory, motivation, effort, social skills, organizational skills and the ability to learn from mistakes.
- What causes ADHD? — We don't know the exact causes of ADHD, but experts believe that genetics play a key role, because children born into families with a history of ADHD are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than those without a family history.
- That means that, if your child has ADHD, other family members are likely affected, and should be evaluated if they show similar symptoms.
- What are the symptoms of ADHD? — The three main symptoms of ADHD are:
- inattention (e.g., trouble staying focused)
 - hyperactivity (e.g., fidgeting, restlessness)
 - impulsiveness (e.g., acting without thinking)
- Many other symptoms are associated with ADHD. Children with ADHD, for example, often have problems at school and in relationships with friends, while adults with ADHD have a higher risk of substance misuse, relationship difficulties and problems at work, to name a few.
- Is there a cure for ADHD? — There is no cure for ADHD, but many treatments have been shown to decrease impulsivity and increase the ability to focus, work and learn.



Exploring your options: Treating ADHD

No “one” treatment works for everyone with ADHD. The most effective approach usually involves first educating families, teachers and patients, followed by a combination of medication, behavioural therapy, psychological help and educational/occupational accommodations.

Education for families and teachers

Children (and adults) with ADHD need guidance and understanding from their families and teachers to reach their full potential. Education for families can include parenting skills training, stress management and (for families and teachers) strategies to deal with common ADHD-related behaviours.

Medication

More than 70 per cent of people with ADHD respond positively to medication. Evidence shows that medications make all of the other strategies and approaches work, so think of medication as the “facilitator,” rather than the “cure.”

Stimulants are the most common ADHD medications. They can reduce ADHD symptoms and have been safely used by children and adults for many decades.

Before starting these medications, you will need to talk to your doctor to make sure the person can take them safely. Like all medications, stimulants can cause side effects. The most common are headache, stomachache, difficulty sleeping, dry mouth, nausea, loss of appetite and increased anxiety. This is not a complete list, so always talk to your doctor or pharmacist about side effects—they can help you prepare strategies to combat them. The more you know what to expect, the less you will worry.

Non-stimulant medications are also used for ADHD when stimulants aren’t an option or don’t work. These take longer than stimulants to start working, so it’s important to take these as directed (e.g., every day). These medications are useful in improving attention and focus, but can be less effective at improving impulsivity.

Behavioural therapy

Behavioural therapy aims to help a person with ADHD improve their habits through practical assistance (such as help organizing tasks or completing schoolwork) or by working through emotionally difficult events. It can also help people with ADHD develop the skills to think before acting or resist the urge to take unnecessary risks. In addition, families of people with ADHD can take part in and benefit from this therapy.

Are generic ADHD drugs just as effective as the brand-name ones?

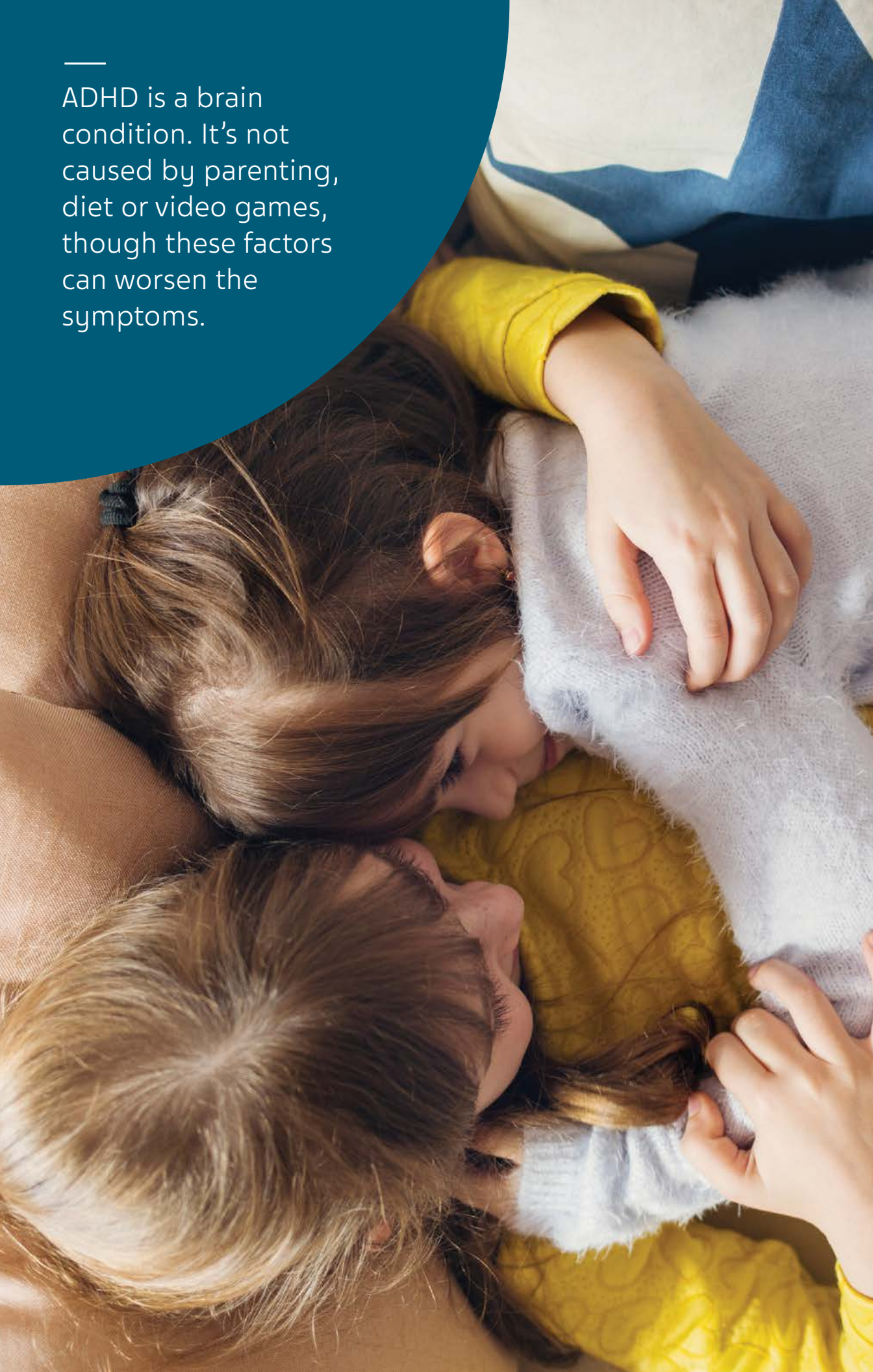
In Canada, generic drugs are tested to ensure they deliver the same active ingredient, in the same dose and for the same length of time as their brand-name equivalents.

Some ADHD drugs deliver the initial dose of medication in the morning, then the rest of the medication is slowly released during the day to keep improving the symptoms of ADHD. These products are known as modified-release drugs. Health Canada has recently proposed some changes to the standards for modified-release drugs to ensure that generic products match the time-release profile of the brand-name drug.

When choosing a generic drug, it's important to ask your doctor to prescribe one that mimics the same time release profile as the brand-name drug.



ADHD is a brain condition. It's not caused by parenting, diet or video games, though these factors can worsen the symptoms.





Life at home and school

Did we do something to cause this?

All parents want their children to be happy and healthy. It can be extremely painful when others notice the negative aspects of your child with ADHD but don't see their positive traits. Parents of children with ADHD can feel frustrated and inadequate—even like failures.

There are many things you can do to help support your child (or any family member) with ADHD.

Improving behaviours

As a parent, you'll need to learn as much as you can about ADHD and how it affects your child. The following are some strategies that can help improve behaviours:

- Use a positive approach and calm tone of voice; use praise where appropriate. Avoid using the words “stop,” “don't” and “no.” Instead of saying, “Stop talking so much,” say, “If you want to talk, raise your hand and wait for your name.”
- Set clear goals and limits and connect them with rewards; keep choices to only two or three options.
- Create a “work ethic” understanding by saying, “If you do this, you get that.” Be consistent, firm and fair, and follow through.
- If parents live in separate homes, it's ideal to share some common rules (e.g., the same bedtime). However, this is not always possible, so the next best thing is for each home to be consistent with its rules.
- Start statements with the phrase, “I understand.” For example, you can say, “I understand this may be difficult for you, but I know you can do it.” This helps the child be less defensive and more likely to listen to your advice and instructions—and to understand that they will have responsibilities like other children.

Meeting goals

ADHD doesn't just affect a child's schoolwork. It can make it harder for them to make friends and be part of activities and sports in which they need focus. The following strategies can help your child focus and meet their goals; share this list with your child's teacher(s) to see where they can help:

- Understand that structure and routine are very important.
- Prioritize tasks and avoid procrastination; split big tasks into several smaller steps.
- Use visual reminders (e.g., sticky notes, calendars) in common places; use timers/apps for reminders (e.g., homework, chores).
- Keep special containers in easy-to-remember locations for items that commonly are lost, such as keys and cellphones.
- Find an area of the house or classroom where the person with ADHD finds it easiest to work.
- Allow the child to take breaks to get up and move around.
- Allow the child to have white noise during tasks that require focus.



How to support a family member living with ADHD

If your child, partner or someone else you care about has been diagnosed with ADHD, here's what you can do to help them:

- Learn as much as you can about ADHD and how it impacts a person's life. This can help you better understand and empathize with some of their behaviours, and better support them in finding treatments that can help.
- Make adjustments in your family routine. Certain tasks are harder for a person with ADHD, such as getting out the door in the morning. Sometimes, small adjustments can make everything go much more smoothly, like waking up earlier or allowing more time to get ready.
- Involve the person with ADHD in family decisions. Children with ADHD often get told what to do (or what not to do). Involving them in choices and decisions can go a long way toward giving them a sense of efficacy, empowerment and control over their lives.



Take care of yourself

As a parent, it's important to take care of your own needs to avoid burnout.

- Take time to get enough sleep, eat right and exercise. Caring for yourself will help you provide the best care for your child.
- Find a support network. Many parents find it helpful to communicate—either in person or online—with other parents who are experiencing the same things.
- Know that it's okay for your family to be unique. Find what works for you and your family, and let go of other people's expectations of what your family should be.

Certain tasks are harder for a person with ADHD, and small adjustments can make everything go much more smoothly.



Dos and don'ts

For parents of children with ADHD



Do

Learn as much as you can about ADHD and the treatment options available.



Do

Regularly see your doctor to make sure your child's ADHD is being effectively treated. Be sure to complete any paperwork (e.g., assessment scales) your doctor provides.



Do

Focus on the positive things your child does, rather than the negative. When they do something well, let them know. Set them up for success with clear goals and limits that are connected to positive incentives and rewards. Use humour to defuse awkward or tense situations. Remember to "catch them being good."



Do

Be consistent. Kids with ADHD need structure, routine and clear communication (don't use vague words). When setting limits or rules, strive to be firm but fair, always follow through and, if you have a co-parent, make sure you're a united front.



Don't

Stop your child's treatment without speaking to their doctor.



Don't

Focus on areas where your child might be falling short. Instead, focus on the progress they're making and the things they're doing well.



Don't

Believe everything you read online about ADHD and its treatments.



Don't

Sweat the small stuff.



Don't

Underestimate what a person with ADHD can do.



Myth:
ADHD only
occurs in boys.



ADHD: Fact vs. fiction

Myth: ADHD is not a “real” condition.

Fact: ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects the functioning of the brain, which can cause serious difficulties. It is the most common mental health condition in children.

Myth: ADHD only occurs in boys.

Fact: While boys are four to nine times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD, girls are affected by ADHD as well. However, because girls are more prone to inattentive symptoms than to hyperactivity or impulsiveness, their symptoms often go unnoticed, so they are often diagnosed later. By adulthood, the rate is almost equal.

Myth: ADHD results from poor parenting or teaching.

Fact: ADHD is mainly caused by genetics. It is not caused by parenting and teaching styles, though these can aggravate the symptoms.

Myth: Food allergies, refined sugar, food additives and poor diet cause ADHD.

Fact: These things don't cause ADHD (but a poor diet can affect attention and function in anyone, including people with ADHD).

Myth: ADHD can be diagnosed with a simple test.

Fact: There is no lab test or X-ray that can diagnose ADHD. An ADHD diagnosis requires a detailed evaluation from a doctor or other healthcare professional. In addition, many children with ADHD have other factors that mimic ADHD, which can complicate the diagnosis.

Myth: All children with ADHD are hyperactive.

Fact: Not everyone with ADHD is hyperactive. Some people with ADHD seem to lack energy, or can appear quiet and reserved. Hyperactivity is also *not* the target symptom. Trying to stop a child from moving too much will lead to over-medicating the child. The target symptoms are inattention and impulse control.

Myth: Children with ADHD can never pay attention or complete their work.

Fact: Like anyone else, children with ADHD tend to find it easier to focus on activities that catch their attention, such as sports, music, video games and art. However, they may struggle more with tasks that require mental effort or tasks they don't enjoy, like schoolwork or highly structured games.

Myth: Everyone has ADHD because we all have low attention spans.

Fact: While all of us have trouble paying attention from time to time, people with ADHD have this trouble more often and to a greater extent, and often have additional symptoms that further impair many aspects of their lives.

Myth: Medication alone can manage ADHD.

Fact: While medication can have positive effects on ADHD symptoms, the best treatment approach combines education, medication and behavioural therapy.



Living better days

Advice from people diagnosed with ADHD

“I didn’t really feel anything when I was diagnosed. Maybe happy that I was correct about having ADHD. Since being diagnosed, I have a better understanding of myself and am able to better harness my motivation.”

“The diagnosis only gave me a path to go down; having the treatment actually work is what, arguably, affected my outlook.”

“ADHD comes in many different forms. While medication can be an invaluable tool, I’ve found that it’s best supplemented with meditation and mindfulness, as those tend to work regardless of your personal quirks and chemistry.”

Advice from parents of children with ADHD

“Our family had been struggling for a long time to understand the challenges our son was going through. The diagnosis was a long process. But after the ADHD diagnosis, our family relationships improved. We were able to research the disease to get a better understanding of what our child might be going through. Reading about other families dealing with ADHD and their struggles helped us work through our own challenges.”

“The advice I would give to someone who cares for a person who has just received an ADHD diagnosis: ‘be patient with the treatment.’ That can be hard when you may have spent a long time already trying to find answers, and now that you have one you want it to just work.”

“ADHD is unique for every person. Read a lot, talk to other caregivers, watch videos about ADHD, listen to people with ADHD tell their story and what it’s like from their perspective, be willing to try new things and know that what worked for one family may not work for you. Gradually, however, as you understand the challenges your child faces, you will be able to find a treatment plan that helps you move forward.”

Visit [TevaCanada.com/Caregivers](https://www.TevaCanada.com/Caregivers) for more resources and support.



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