ADHD in one page

What it is

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a condition where the brain manages attention, activity and impulses differently from most people, from childhood on. It is common, it is real, and it runs in families. It is not a character flaw and it is not laziness. In Australia it is diagnosed by a trained clinician using an interview and history, because no single test can find it.

- ADHD affects attention, activity and impulses

The signs

What are the symptoms of ADHD?

ADHD symptoms fall into three groups: inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. You might lose track of tasks, forget things, fidget, interrupt or act before thinking. For a diagnosis, they start in childhood, last for months and show up in more than one place.

How a diagnosis happens

How do I get assessed?

Start with a GP appointment and ask for an open referral. Then book a psychiatrist (a paediatrician for a child). The specialist does the assessment, prescribes if needed, and keeps your GP informed through the details on your referral.

Treatment

Does therapy work for ADHD?

Yes, with an honest size attached. The Australian guideline says CBT should be offered to adults and teenagers with ADHD, alongside medication rather than instead of it. The certainty is low, which means the studies are small and more research could change the answer. Therapy will not remove ADHD. It helps you build systems around it.

Medication

Can I get ADHD medication on the PBS?

Yes. All three stimulants and two non-stimulants are on the PBS, at up to $25.00 a script, or $7.70 with a concession card. The rules turn on your age at diagnosis. Concerta and atomoxetine need a diagnosis by 18 and guanfacine by 17. Adults diagnosed later can get Ritalin LA or Vyvanse if their records show childhood symptoms, backed by a parent, teacher or someone else.

- Every stimulant is on the PBS
- A PBS script costs up to $25.00, or $7.70

Who diagnoses and who prescribes

Who can diagnose ADHD, and who can prescribe?

Psychiatrists, paediatricians and trained psychologists can all diagnose ADHD. Prescribing sits with doctors: a psychiatrist, a paediatrician, or in some states a trained GP; a few states also let nurse practitioners continue treatment. A psychologist is not a doctor, so their diagnosis ends in a report, not a script.

- Three kinds of clinician can diagnose ADHD

Who can prescribe, and on what conditions, differs by state and territory. See the pages on your state at haihealth.au/blog/adhd.

What it costs

What does an ADHD assessment cost?

There is no official average. One study of 2024 quotes found average totals of $1,163 for a psychiatrist and $1,622 for a psychologist, before any rebate. Your price depends on the clinic you pick. As a rule of thumb, you pay more to be seen sooner.

- There is no official average

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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