

# Understanding ADHD

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a learning difficulty characterised by hyperactivity, distractibility, and processing difficulties. ADHD falls under the umbrella of neurodivergence. This factsheet looks at some common facts about ADHD, how it affects people and how to support colleagues with ADHD.

## Information about ADHD

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a series of characteristics and behaviours believed to be the result of a neurodevelopmental difference in the brain, which affects neurotransmitters and brain structure. It generally presents in three different subtypes of 'predominantly hyperactive', 'predominantly inattentive' or 'combined'. Up to 4% of the global population have ADHD, while the total number of ADHD in the adult population in the UK is estimated between 3% and 4%, with the majority of these individuals being undiagnosed.

Attention deficit disorder (ADD) is also another associated term with ADHD. This is no longer given as a diagnosis as it is considered a subtype of ADHD, and falls under the 'inattentive' type, but those who were given this diagnosis may still use this term to describe themselves.

Employees with ADHD can be hyper focused, creative, high-energy individuals with a variety of skillsets. Understanding ways to support colleagues with ADHD will have a lasting influence on the impact they could have on the organisation. Supporting colleagues through reasonable adjustments is a legal requirement and will help ensure their skillsets are maximised.

## Knowing that ADHD is a difference and not a deficiency is imperative to understand.

Ensuring employees with ADHD are fully supported is important and that any form of discrimination against employees with ADHD is dealt with appropriately. Furthermore, ADHD has a

differing impact on each individual and this of course will impact engagement and inclusion throughout the entire organisation.

### **What are some facts surrounding ADHD?**

- There are three types of ADHD:
  - Inattentive ADHD – characterised with difficulties staying focused and attending to daily routine tasks. Individuals may be easily distracted by sights and sounds in their environment, change between one activity to another quickly, become easily distracted and bored, make careless mistakes and/or have a short attention span.
  - Hyperactive and Impulsive ADHD – characterised with impulsivity and hyperactivity. Individuals may have difficulty trying to sit still, fidget, concentrate on tasks or may show lack of patience, talk excessively, act impulsively and/or without thinking.
  - Combined ADHD – a combination of the above.
- Although ADHD has its challenges, people with ADHD often have a different perspective on life and can be considered to be original, inventive thinkers, artistic, hyper focused, imaginative, creative, compassionate and great at multi-tasking
- ADHD is a biological difference in how the brain functions, with MRI scans showing a slower development in the part of the brain that is involved in thinking, planning and paying attention in children
- There is a genetic element to ADHD, so it can be passed on from parents to offspring and is common in families
- Brain injuries have also been linked to causing a very small number of ADHD diagnoses
- Formal diagnosis can be difficult to obtain due to many barriers that make the process challenging, such as costs, waiting times or lengthy forms and processes
- Many people with ADHD self-diagnose. This is considered valid and generally accepted by the community
- ADHD is also linked with other conditions such as depression, anxiety, personality disorder, bipolar disorder and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Employees who have been diagnosed with ADHD are most likely to satisfy the definition of disability under The Equality Act 2010

### What affect does ADHD have on people?

- ADHD has a list of common symptoms, but each person will experience ADHD differently and each symptom has a differing degree of severity
- ADHD can cause individuals to be easily distracted or make it difficult to concentrate
- Complex tasks or tasks with many stages can be overwhelming
- It can cause a lack of motivation for tasks which can be boring or repetitive
- Carelessness and lack of attention to detail
- Continually starting new tasks before finishing old ones
- Restlessness, edginess, and difficulties relaxing
- Inability to focus; zoning out in conversations and finding it hard to listen
- Poor organisational and time management skills
- Becoming absorbed in tasks that are stimulating to the point of all else being ignored
- It can cause 'time blindness' – a difficulty with measuring and monitoring time
- Continually losing or misplacing things as well as forgetfulness
- Difficulties with socialising, keeping quiet, blurting responses, poor social timing when talking to others and frequent interruption of others
- Irritability and a quick temper
- Inability to deal with stress, easily flustered and low self-esteem

### What support can be offered for people with ADHD?

Every person with ADHD is different and there is not a one size fits all solution to accommodating ADHD in the workplace. The best approach is to create a safe space for colleagues with ADHD to have open discussions about their needs and support. Individuals may even be unsure of what their needs are and what reasonable adjustments may be possible.

- Audit the recruitment process to reduce barriers

- Improve understanding of ADHD and research – it's not a deficiency but a difference
- Create a safe space within the working environment for people to share experiences
- Advertise staff networks and other internal / external support that is available
- Audit training and development to ensure it is accessible
- Consider and possibly adapt performance management system measures
- Actively promote needs assessments and workplace adjustments
- Offer flexible working hours or a flexible working arrangement
- Provide optional quiet spaces to work or flexibility to work from home
- Allow headphones or noise cancellation headphones in the office
- Allow frequent movement breaks and normalise fidget toys in the office
- Allow non-meeting days – days which are blocked from meetings in their calendar
- Reduce cold calling – asking an ADHD person if they are free for a call before calling unexpectedly
- Provide clear emails with bullet points and defined actions
- Provide fewer channels of communication to juggle
- Provide guidance for planning where several tasks need to be completed to a deadline
- Be patient
- Provide training to line managers to increase understanding of ADHD
- Focus conversations on strengths and ways to develop employees with ADHD, determine what type of work and ways of working best suits an ADHD person
- Encourage managers to talk openly and support ADHD (using the [Inclusion Passport](#))

### Resources:

<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/background-information/prevalence/>

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/adhd-benefits#strengths-and-benefits>

<https://www.clinical-partners.co.uk/for-adults/adult-adhd-add/types-of-adhd>

<https://www.clinical-partners.co.uk/for-adults/adult-adhd-add>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/symptoms/>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/adhd/benefits-of-adhd>

<https://www.adhdadult.uk/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/adhd-and-mental-health/>

<https://chadd.org/for-adults/workplace-issues/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/basics/adhd/adhd-work>

<https://adhduk.co.uk/access-to-work/>