

ADHD: Beyond the Basics

Major Diagnostic Criteria

- A. Persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity
 - a. 6+ symptoms from a category for children
 - b. 5+ symptoms for 17 and up
- B. Symptoms present before age 12
- C. Symptoms present in multiple settings
- D. Clear impact on quality of life
- E. Not due to another mental or medical illness

Making a Diagnosis

ADHD is a clinical diagnosis. There is no “test” for ADHD. There are neurocognitive tests and rating scales that can aid with the diagnosis, but they are not required.

Apples don’t fall far from trees; there is a considerable genetic component to ADHD. If you suspect ADHD, look for a family history of ADHD, learning disorders, autism spectrum disorder, and other neurodevelopmental disorders.

A positive response to a stimulant is not a diagnosis. Most people will have a change in their executive functioning in response to a stimulant.

Your work up should include looking for co-morbid mood symptoms, anxiety, trauma, and other neurodevelopmental disorders, as well as a thorough history and physical to address any other symptoms or conditions that may affect your treatment plan.

Treating ADHD

ADHD should be considered a chronic illness, and should follow principles of chronic care and the medical home

Apples don’t fall far from trees. If a family member is already prescribed a stimulant, that may be the best place to start

If a patient responds to a medication but experiences side effects, try altering the dose/timing of medication or switching to another medication within the class before switching classes

If FDA-approved medications do not result in a satisfactory treatment response, review the diagnosis, consider neuropsychological testing, consider non-FDA- approved medications, or possibly seek a psychiatry consult

Can consider re-trial of medications once puberty has started, as side effect profile can change as metabolism changes

A helpful resource for stimulant and non-stimulant medications: <http://www.adhdmedicationguide.com/>

Treatment Algorithm

Goodman DW. Primary Psychiatry Vol 17. No 2. 2010.

