CPNI
Cyprus Paediatric Neurology Institute
Παιδονευρολογικό Ινστιτούτο Κύπρου

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES

ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)

ADHD is one of the neurodevelopmental conditions, like autism and developmental coordination disorder (dyspraxia). It affects how a child pays attention, controls their movements and manages their impulses. It is not caused by bad parenting and it is not the child's fault.

It is common

About 5 in every 100 children have ADHD, in every country and every kind of family.

Girls are often missed

Boys are diagnosed more often. Girls more often have quieter, inattentive signs that are recognised later.

A lot helps

Support at home and school, and medication when needed, make a big difference.

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects attention, activity and impulse control. Not every child with ADHD is hyperactive. Some children have difficulties mainly with attention (the inattentive type, which used to be called ADD and is easily missed, especially in girls), some mainly with being overactive and impulsive, and some with both (the combined type).

- ✓ Inattention: finding it hard to focus, finish tasks, organise things or remember instructions.
- ✓ Hyperactivity: moving a lot, fidgeting, finding it hard to sit still or be quiet.
- ✓ Impulsivity: acting or speaking without thinking, interrupting, finding it hard to wait.

Every child is sometimes restless or distracted. In ADHD the signs are much stronger than in other children of the same age, have lasted at least 6 months, show up in more than one place (for example home and school) and cause real difficulties. Children with ADHD also have many strengths: energy, creativity, curiosity and a big heart are common.

Signs at different ages

Preschool (under 5)

- ✓ Always on the go, climbs on everything, finds it very hard to wait or take turns.
- ✓ More accidents and stronger tantrums than expected for their age.

School age (5 to 11)

- ✓ Daydreams, misses instructions, makes careless mistakes, loses things.
- ✓ Gets out of their seat, talks a lot, shouts out answers, interrupts.

Teenagers (12 to 18)

- ✓ Inner restlessness, problems with planning, time and deadlines.
- ✓ Risk taking, strong emotions or low self-esteem.

ADHD is harder to diagnose before age 5, because all young children are active. We usually watch and support first.

What causes ADHD?

ADHD is mainly genetic and often runs in families. Being born very early or very small, or exposure to alcohol or smoking before birth, make it more likely. It is more common in children with epilepsy or some genetic conditions.

ADHD is not caused by bad parenting, sugar, vaccines, screens, or the child being lazy.

How is ADHD assessed?

There is no single blood test or scan for ADHD. A specialist gathers information from you, from school and from meeting your child, over one or more appointments.

1. A detailed talk about your child's development, health, family and daily life.
2. Questionnaires filled in by parents and teachers.
3. Reports from school and any earlier assessments.
4. A physical and neurological examination, with height, weight, blood pressure and heart rate.
5. Checking for conditions that look like ADHD or come with it. Extra tests such as a hearing test, EEG or ECG only if needed.

Conditions that often come with ADHD

Most children with ADHD have at least one other difficulty: learning difficulties such as dyslexia, autism, anxiety or low mood, oppositional behaviour, tics, coordination or sleep problems, and speech and language difficulties. We look for these too, because they also need support.

Treatment and support

There is no single cure, but a lot helps. The best results come from combining several kinds of support, planned around your child.

- ✓ Understanding and parent training: practical ways to manage behaviour and reduce stress at home. For children under 5, this is the first treatment we recommend.
- ✓ Support at school: small changes in the classroom (see below).
- ✓ Psychological support for older children and teenagers, for example cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for organisation, emotions and self-esteem.
- ✓ Medication for children aged 5 and over whose ADHD still causes significant difficulties. Stimulants (such as methylphenidate) are usually tried first; non-stimulants (such as atomoxetine or guanfacine) are alternatives.

Medication does not change personality and is not addictive when used as prescribed. Common side effects are reduced appetite, trouble falling asleep, stomach aches or headaches, usually mild. We check growth, blood pressure and heart rate regularly, and nothing is decided without you.

What helps at home

- ✓ Keep routines predictable, with a picture or written timetable.
- ✓ Give short, clear instructions, one or two steps at a time, and ask your child to repeat them.
- ✓ Praise specific good behaviour straight away, much more often than you correct.
- ✓ Use rewards that come quickly, such as stickers, points or small privileges.
- ✓ Keep 3 to 5 clear house rules and apply them calmly and consistently.
- ✓ Break tasks into small steps, allow movement breaks, and build on your child’s strengths.

Working with school

Share the diagnosis with the school, with your permission, and agree a plan together.

- Sitting near the teacher, away from doors and windows.
- One instruction at a time, also written on the board.
- Shorter pieces of work, frequent check-ins and movement breaks.
- Extra time or a quiet room for tests.
- A home–school notebook, and praise for effort, not only results.

Sleep, screens, exercise and food

- Keep a regular bedtime and no screens for an hour before bed. Tell us if sleep is a problem; it can be treated.
- Agree daily screen limits and keep screens out of the bedroom at night.
- Daily physical activity helps mood, sleep and concentration.
- Regular meals and breakfast matter. No special diet cures ADHD.

Common myths

Myth	Fact
“They can focus on video games, so it isn’t ADHD.”	Children with ADHD can focus on things they find very interesting. The difficulty is with less exciting tasks.
“Children grow out of it.”	Signs often improve, but many people still have some difficulties as adults. Support makes a big difference.
“Medication turns children into zombies.”	At the right dose, medication helps children be themselves. If a child seems flat, the dose needs adjusting.
“Medication leads to drug use.”	Treating ADHD does not increase the risk of drug misuse, and may lower it.

Looking after yourself

- ✓ Share the load with family and friends, and take short breaks for yourself.
- ✓ Connect with other parents. ADD-ADHD Cyprus offers information and support for families (add-adhdcy.org).
- ✓ Difficult days are not your failure or your child's. If you feel very stressed or low, speak to your own doctor.

Coming for an assessment? Print our parent and teacher questionnaires (button at the top of this page), fill them in and bring them, with school reports and any earlier assessments.

Contact CPNI

Concerned about your child's attention or behaviour? Call our office on +357 22 476 627 to arrange an assessment, or email cpni2007@gmail.com. We see children through GeSY, and privately if they are not GeSY beneficiaries, in Nicosia and Limassol.

More leaflets and information: www.cpni.com.cy

This leaflet gives general information. It does not replace advice from your child's doctor.

Reviewed by Dr Paola Nicolaides, Consultant Paediatric Neurologist, November 2026.

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