

Why should GPs be interested in ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common behavioural disorders in the UK with many children continuing to have symptoms through adolescence into adulthood. It can cause a significant impairment in academic, occupational & social functioning with the risk of negative long term outcomes if untreated. It is estimated that currently only about 10% of those who suffer from Adult ADHD have received a formal diagnosis. The World Health Organisation World Mental Health Survey concluded that Adult ADHD often co-occurs with other psychiatric disorders and is associated with considerable role disabilityⁱ. It is highly treatable. NICE guidelines recommend referral to a specialist in ADHD for suspected new cases.ⁱⁱ

How common is Adult ADHD?

By the age of 25, an estimated 15% of people diagnosed with childhood ADHD still have a full range of symptoms, and an estimated 65% still have symptoms which affect their daily lives. A recent 2009 research publicationⁱⁱⁱ suggested a prevalence of 2.5% of the adult population for Adult ADHD. There is a wide range of prevalence rates cited in the literature, with differences between North America and Europe. Estimates of rates in the US are cited as being nearer 5%^{iv}. Some of this variation is due to the different interpretations of the definitions of ADHD.

The difficulty with diagnosing Adult ADHD?

The diagnosis of ADHD in adults is a clinical one. It requires retrospectively establishing whether the symptoms were also present in childhood, even if not previously recognised. Every normal individual exhibits ADHD-like symptoms occasionally (when we are tired or stressed, for example) but in order to be diagnosed with ADHD, the symptoms should be present from childhood and persistently interfere with functioning in multiple spheres of an individual's life - work, school and interpersonal relationships.

Screening questions for Adult ADHD						
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	
How often do you have trouble wrapping up the final details of a project, once the challenging parts have been done?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Score one point for each of the first three questions if you answered sometimes/often/very often to any. Also add one point for each of the last three questions if you answered often/very often to any.
How often do you have difficulty getting things in order when you have to do a task that required organisation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How often do you have problems remembering appointments or obligations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
When you have a task that requires a lot of thought, how often do you avoid or delay getting started?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If your patient scores four points or more out of the maximum six it would be useful to arrange an ADHD assessment. If (s)he scored less than four points then it is highly unlikely that (s)he has Adult ADHD.
How often do you fidget or squirm with your hands or feet when you have to sit down for a long time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How often do you feel overly active and compelled to do things, like you were driven by a motor?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This questionnaire is based on the Adult Self Report Scale (ASRS-v1.1) and has been developed by the World Health Organisation. ^v

Symptoms of ADHD in adults

The symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder can be categorised into two broad groups of behavioural problems - symptoms of inattentiveness, and symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsiveness. Common symptoms within these groups include a short attention span, restlessness, being easily distracted, and constant fidgeting. Hyperactivity tends to decrease in adults, while inattentiveness tends to get worse as the pressure of adult life increases. To complicate the diagnosis, some people with ADHD also have additional problems; such as sleep disorders, low self-esteem, anxiety and depression.

Our Specialist

Dr Sally Cubbin MRCPsych MSc DipCBT is a highly qualified Consultant Psychiatrist with special expertise in the diagnosis and management of Adult ADHD. She was first registered with the GMC in 1993 (GMC number 4009027). She completed her higher training in psychiatry in the Oxford Deanery and also The Maudsley Hospital, London and is registered on the GMC Specialist Register for General Adult Psychiatry and the Psychiatry of Older Adults. Dr Cubbin has particular expertise in the assessment and treatment of Adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Adult ADHD). She has worked as a Consultant Psychiatrist at The Maudsley Hospital Adult ADHD National Referral Service in London

Arranging an Adult ADHD assessment

since 2008 where she assesses and manages patients with this disorder. She holds a diploma in CBT and uses this to compliment the medical management of her patients.

As for any referral please include details of the patient's previous medical and psychiatric history and prescription history. An ADHD assessment lasts up to three hours and uses a well researched protocol using Conners, Barkley, Wender-Utah and the Adult ADHD Self Report screening scales and a semi-structured interview with the patient and, where possible, a family member who knew the patient in childhood, ideally a parent. Old school reports if available will be analysed. Identifying other psychiatric conditions, such as anxiety, depression or substance misuse, that may also be present and may need treatment in their own right is also given priority. The interview will take up to three hours. Fees can be structured to include a package of follow up, some of which can be completed by telephone and email in order to titrate the dose efficiently and conveniently early on.

The number of follow up sessions depends on how much monitoring and adjustment of medication is required. NICE guidelines suggest that patients, once stable, should remain under annual review by a specialist.

- i The prevalence and effects of Adult Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) on the performance of workers: results from the WHO World Mental Health Survey Initiative. Graff et al Occupational and Environmental Medicine 2008;65:835-842
<http://oem.bmj.com/cgi/content/abstract/65/12/835>
- ii <http://www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/CG72>
- iii Simon V, Czobor P, Bálint S et al Prevalence and correlates of adult attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: meta-analysis The British Journal of Psychiatry (2009) 194: 204-211
- iv The Prevalence and Correlates of Adult ADHD in the United States: Results From the National Comorbidity Survey Replication Am J Psychiatry 163:716-723, April 2006
<http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/ajp;163/4/716>
- v Kessler, R.C., Adler, L., Ames, M. et al (2005). The World Health Organization Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale (ASRS). Psychological Medicine, 35(2), 245-256
<http://www.hcp.med.harvard.edu/ncs/ftpdir/adhd/18%20Question%20ADHD-ASRS-v1-1.pdf>

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Cardinal Clinic Adult ADHD Service

Information for GPs