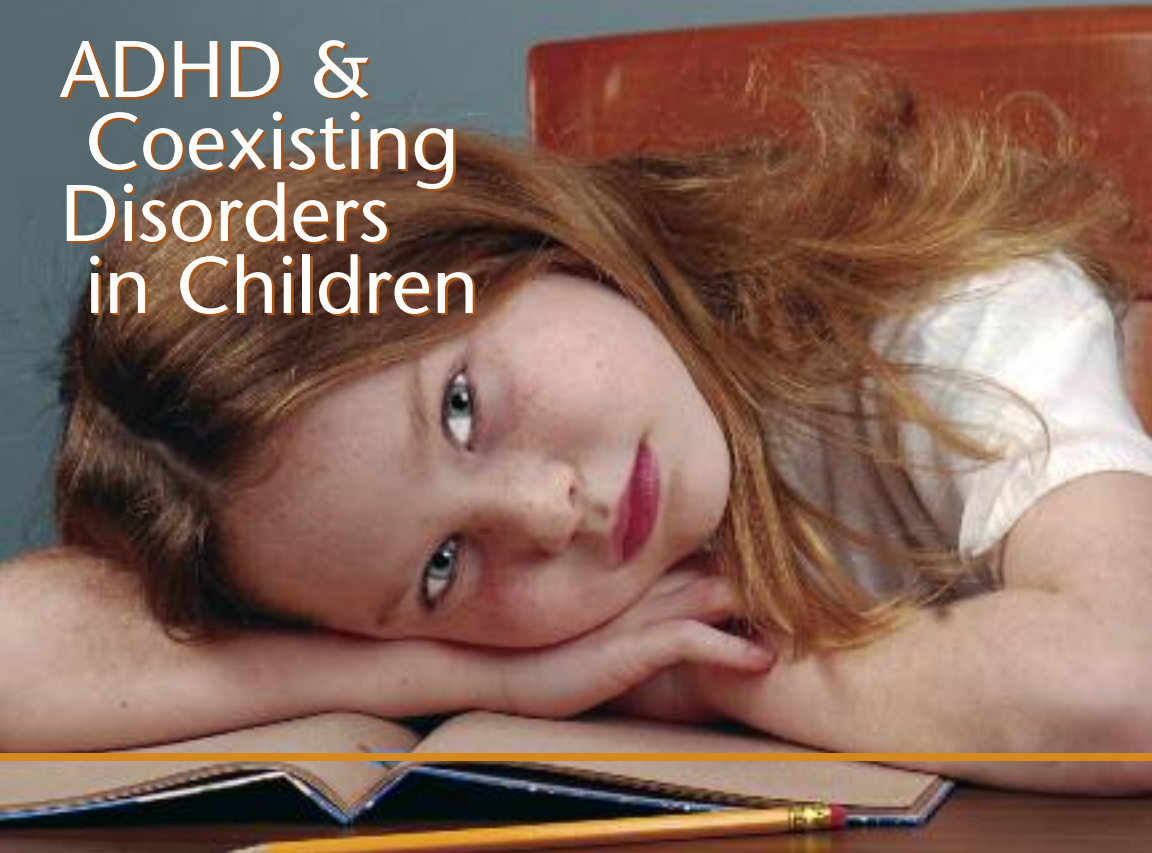


ADHD & Coexisting Disorders in Children





Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a recognized medical condition that often requires medical intervention.¹ Establishing a diagnosis of ADHD is complex and requires information that can be obtained from multiple sources, including parents, physicians and teachers.² One of the difficulties in diagnosing ADHD is as many as one-third of children being evaluated for ADHD have a co-existing condition.²

When two different disorders are present within the same patient at the same time, the diseases or illnesses are said to be *comorbid*. Some of the more common comorbid conditions include the following²:

- ▶ Conduct disorder (CD)
- ▶ Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD)
- ▶ Anxiety disorders
- ▶ Mood disorders
- ▶ Learning disabilities
- ▶ Other disorders

In addition to treatment for the symptoms of ADHD, your child may require medication and/or counselling to help control the symptoms of the coexisting disorder.¹



OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER AND CONDUCT DISORDER

Approximately 50% of children with ADHD will meet the criteria for oppositional defiant disorder, and about 10 to 15% will meet the criteria for conduct disorder.¹ Children with oppositional defiant disorder often argue with adults and are angry, resentful and easily annoyed, blaming others when things go wrong.³ Conduct disorder can include bullying, destructive behaviour, deceitfulness and rule violation.³ Children with conduct disorder have a higher risk of getting into trouble with the law, and studies have found that they fare more poorly in adulthood than other children who are diagnosed with ADHD alone.² Preliminary studies suggest that these coexisting conditions are more frequent in children with the predominantly hyperactive-impulsive and combined subtypes of ADHD.² Counselling and/or medication may be needed to treat these coexisting conditions.¹

ANXIETY DISORDERS

It is estimated that 25 to 30% of children with ADHD will also have a coexisting anxiety disorder.¹ Children with anxiety disorders have extreme feelings of fear, worry or panic and often seem agitated. Other behavioural features include tantrums, attention seeking, overdependence and rituals.⁴ Preliminary studies suggest that these coexisting conditions are more frequent in children with the predominantly inattentive and combined




subtypes of ADHD.² Counselling and/or medication may be needed to treat these coexisting conditions.¹

MOOD DISORDERS

The coexistence of ADHD and mood disorders is common: 29 to 45% for major depression, and 11 to 23% for mania.⁴ Signs and symptoms of depression may include changes in appetite and weight, trouble sleeping, fatigue, diminished ability to think, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, and suicidal preoccupation.⁴ Signs of mania in children may include extreme irritability, explosive mood, decreased sleep, or overtalkativeness.⁴ Adolescents with coexisting mood disorders and ADHD are at an increased risk for suicide attempts.² Preliminary studies suggest that these disorders are more common among children with inattentive and combined types of ADHD.² Children with mood disorders often require a different type of medication than those normally used to treat ADHD.¹

LEARNING DISABILITIES

Rates of learning disabilities that coexist with ADHD have been reported to be anywhere from 19 to 80%, depending on the definition used.¹ ADHD is not a learning disability. However, ADHD can make it hard for a child to do well in school.⁴ These children need appropriate classroom accommodations to help them cope with their learning disability.¹ Preliminary studies suggest that



these coexisting conditions are more frequent in children with predominantly inattentive and combined subtypes of ADHD.²

OTHER DISORDERS

Tic Disorders

Children with ADHD may have higher rates of tic disorders such as Tourette's syndrome, and this may contribute to further problems because of the distractions and social impairments related to the tics themselves.⁴

Developmental Disabilities

ADHD is 2 to 3 times more common in developmentally delayed children than in those with normal IQ scores.¹

Neurofibromatosis

Neurofibromatosis is a genetic disorder that affects the skin and the nervous system. Some research and clinical studies suggest there may be a link between neurofibromatosis type 1 and ADHD, but further study is required.⁵

SUMMARY


Comorbid disorders occurring in children with ADHD can lead to significantly greater social, emotional and psychological difficulties.¹ It is critical to identify any comorbid conditions so that appropriate interventions can be chosen.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Sub-classifications of ADHD³

- ▶ *Predominantly Inattentive Type:* When a person displays 6 or more symptoms of inattention, but fewer than 6 symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity, and the symptoms have persisted for at least 6 months.
- ▶ *Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type:* When a person displays 6 or more symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity, but fewer than 6 symptoms of inattention, and the symptoms have persisted for at least 6 months.
- ▶ *Combined Type:* When a person displays 6 or more symptoms of inattention and 6 or more symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity, and the symptoms have persisted for at least 6 months.
- ▶ Most children and adolescents with ADHD have the combined type.⁶





Tourette's Syndrome: is a genetic, neurological disorder consisting of both motor tics (i.e. eye blinking or head shaking) and vocal tics (i.e. coughing or humming) that have been present for at least a year and occur prior to age 18.³

Borderline Personality Disorder: is a condition characterized by impulsive actions, inappropriate intense anger related to fear of abandonment, mood instability, and chaotic relationships.³

Neurofibromatosis (NF): is a set of genetic disorders, which cause tumours to grow along various types of nerves and spots on the skin. NF can affect the development of non-nervous tissues such as bones and skin. It can also lead to developmental abnormalities.⁷

FOR MORE INFORMATION

There are many reliable sources of information on ADHD. A good place to start is:

- ▶ www.caddra.ca (The Canadian Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Resource Alliance)
- ▶ www.ldac-acta.ca (The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada)
- ▶ www.chaddcanada.org (Children and Adults with A.D.D.)

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