

ADHD EDUCATION

MENTAL HEALTH FOCUS >

ADHD & CO-MORBID MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can present many challenges and learning to manage it appropriately can greatly improve quality of life. Unfortunately, sometimes people with ADHD suffer from other mental health conditions as well. Understanding this can aid in the identification and proper treatment of associated conditions, thereby assisting in improving the overall wellbeing of the individual with ADHD. Some of the commonly associated issues are:

- **Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)** - it has been estimated that between 13 - 16% of children with ADHD suffer from GAD as well **(1,2,3)**. There is an even higher chance of the two conditions occurring together when ADHD extends into adulthood**(4)**. People with both disorders tend to have higher levels of impairment than those with only ADHD. Difficulties with social interaction, academic performance or home life can worsen feelings of anxiety, meaning that appropriate management of ADHD is as important as ever in these individuals. It is important to note that high levels of anxiety do affect the response to ADHD drug treatment **(4,5)**. The stimulant drugs that are used to treat ADHD have been shown to assist in reducing anxiety **(6)**. Always stick to your treatment plan and get advice from a doctor if you suspect that your child may be showing signs of an anxiety disorder.
- **Depression** - children with ADHD have significantly higher rates of depression than those without it **(7)**. Those with both disorders tend to have more severe symptoms and greater long-term impairment than those with ADHD alone **(7)**. The onset of depression can take place long after the diagnosis of ADHD has been made, so be on the lookout for symptoms such as irritability, loss of interest and/or motivation, excessive tearfulness, low mood or changes in sleeping patterns.
- **Tourette syndrome (TS)** - this condition is characterised by vocal or motor tics, meaning that someone who suffers from it may display involuntary movements (e.g. eye blinking, shoulder shrugging, neck twisting) or make involuntary noises (e.g. grunting, snorting, clicking or even words/phrases). People with TS often have ADHD as well **(8)**. ADHD usually develops 1 - 2 years before the tics **(9)**. The involuntary movements or noises tend to get worse if the person is experiencing stress or anxiety **(10)**. Studies have shown that low to moderate doses of stimulant medications do not cause worsening of tics **(11)**. If your child with ADHD develops tics, speak to your doctor who can help you to weigh up the risks and benefits of different medication options.
- **Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and conduct disorder (CD)** - ODD is characterised by negative and disruptive behaviour, with a general disregard for authority. CD sufferers tend to display more severe antisocial behaviour such as stealing, vandalism, fighting or hurting other people or animals. Both are more likely to be present in someone with ADHD than someone without it **(12)**. These are challenging disorders to manage and require the intervention of a mental health professional. Be careful not to label your child with one of these disorders without expert opinion. This is not simply a disruptive or naughty child. If you suspect that your child may be showing signs of ODD or CD, seek advice from a professional experienced in their diagnosis.



These are just some of the common conditions associated with ADHD. They can add to the complication of management, but they further highlight the importance of proper adherence and follow up. All patients with ADHD need support from those around them. If another disorder is added into the mix, it makes that support all the more important.

LEARNING TO
MANAGE IT
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SOURCES >

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