

Attention & ADHD

Attention is the ability to focus or concentrate on a particular thing.

Research has highlighted how ADHD brains function or appear different. An ADHD brain's frontal cortex and basal ganglia are typically smaller than a non-ADHD brain. It is believed that these sections of the brain play important roles in focus and attention. This means that someone with ADHD may have problems with:

- Shifting Attention – Switching between different tasks or demands. (E.G., a manager may ask you to stop a task you are working on and move to another task which is of higher importance)
- Divided Attention – Multi-tasking or doing two things at once. (E.G., you may be cooking a dinner for your family whilst your children are playing in the next room, hence needing to divide your attention between both activities)
- Sustained Attention – Concentrating for a period of time without getting distracted (E.G., having to drive a long distance)
- Selective Attention – Focusing on one thing with such intensity that you overlook other things that are going on around you. This is also known as a hyper focus. People who experience hyper focus often become so engrossed in an activity that they block out the world around them – (E.G., playing a video game for 8 hours without eating, drinking or using the toilet)

Attention & Dopamine

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter (a messenger of the brain) and it is involved in several neural functions including attention. Some research suggests that dopamine activity could be different in people with ADHD compared to those without ADHD.

Symptoms of Poor Attention

- Paying attention to the details and/or making frequent mistakes while doing tasks.
- Staying focused on long-winded tasks (like reading, listening to a presentation, etc.).
- Listening to others.
- Following through on tasks or obligations. You can easily lose focus in the middle of a task.
- Managing time and meeting deadlines.
- Performing tasks that need significant brain power, like filling out forms or writing reports.
- Keeping track of common items needed to complete everyday tasks (pencil, wallet, keys, phone, etc.).
- Staying in the moment without distractions.
- Remembering to complete routine tasks (chores, errands, appointments, etc.).

Impact of Poor Attention

These things can affect your relationships, as well as your performance in school, at work or during activities. You might:

- Miss strict deadlines.
- Be late for school, work or appointments.
- Lose or misplace important documents or items.
- Work or live in a “messy” or disorganized space.
- Find it difficult to socialize and maintain friendships.

Being easily distracted can affect your physical safety if you work or participate in high-risk activities where following instructions are a high priority.

While growing up, you may have been reprimanded for your behaviours. Teachers might have told you that you're "lazy" for not turning in assignments or "careless" for not paying attention to lectures. These are far from the truth, as your brain functions differently from those around you. You still listen and retain information; you just do it in a way that works for you.

It can be hard for others who don't experience ADHD to relate to how you feel. As a result, inattentive ADHD can impact your emotional well-being and mental health. It is important to remember that poor regulation of attention is not a demonstration of thoughtlessness, work ethic or consideration, it is a presentation of how your brain functions differently.

If you feel your inattentive symptoms are impacting your mental health it is important that you reach out to loved ones or professional services.