



## Hypo alert! Dealing with ADHD

**Are your child's endless tantrums, door-slamming and wild behaviour just plain old naughtiness? Or could it be ADHD? Here's how to find a difficult child's inner angel.**

"I knew something was awry with Daniel from the day he could crawl," says ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) educator Kerry Cooney, whose son Daniel was diagnosed with the disorder at age 11.

"He was rough at play and loved pulling heads and arms off his sister's dolls. He was always on the go, slept poorly and ripped his sheets.

"His quest for food, drink and activity could never be satisfied. At school, he was constantly losing everything.

"He found reading and writing beyond him, and after seven years left primary school not knowing the 100 most used words in the vocabulary."

Kerry is now using her experience as an ADHD mum, educator and author to help other families stem the rising tide of ADHD in Australia.

"Many parents are left pulling out their hair. But ADHD is a genetic biochemical condition like depression. It is a real illness, that needs real treatment and strategies," says Kerry, author of *Every Day With ADHD*.

Here Kerry answers your most asked questions...

### What are the symptoms?

"Generally ADHD kids hate to be confined to anywhere - a chair, cot, pram or room. And they touch anything within reach," says Kerry.

"Of course all children at a certain stage behave like this. However the child with ADHD will display these behaviours sometimes into adult life. Also, there is usually a 'franticness' to their movements."

"These children also blurt before they think, rush through activities and are highly impulsive (ie. snatching things from your hands to see). They have difficulty following instructions and constantly interrupt or chat endlessly.

"They most often forget their belongings and are easily distracted. They sometimes have difficulty keeping or making friends."

### What about physical problems?

They may be clumsy and accident prone, or have problems with fine motor skills like tying laces or using scissors. Or even gross motor skills like hopping, skipping or jumping. ADHD kids may also have increased hunger and thirst or else be very fussy about their eating. Other symptoms include temperature sensitivity (ie jumpers in summer and a T-shirt in winter) or the child will complain about loud noises or light sensitivity. They may also have sleep difficulties."

### What about in the classroom?

"ADHD kids are often highly intelligent but there may be problems with reading and writing, untidy handwriting and avoidance of homework."

### Can you have ADHD without the hyperactivity?

"Yes. Some children will have some of the above characteristics but instead of being hypo may have a tendency for daydreaming or gravitate toward quieter activities. They become very uncomfortable with a lot of attention on them."

### Who should decide when drugs are needed?

"There has been a lot of press about the overuse of stimulant drugs in kids in Australia. A paediatrician with years of experience is the best person to make that judgement, not your mother-in-law, neighbour or anyone else. But you have the final say."

### Can ADHD be completely controlled by diet or medication?



"No. Just like anxiety or depression, ADHD may require medication, but always the use of other strategies,' says Kerry.

"Medication is still considered the fastest acting and most effective method of treating severe ADHD. It improves concentration which often improves impulsive, hyperactive or angry behaviour.

"Many experts talk about using drugs as a tool to "reach a child" and then "teach them "sensory" strategies to self regulate. If for instance they're feeling antsy after lunch they could drink a glass of cold water. This raises the child's arousal level, relieving their need to move.

"Diet can help in some cases, but is not usually enough alone."

[Click here](#) for more information about how colours and additives can affect behaviour.

### Can bad parenting can cause ADHD?

"Parents are often told 'why don't you be a bit stricter with him?' but ADHD is not about bad parenting. Otherwise how do you explain parents with several children, one with ADHD and all the others normal happy kids?

ADHD is a medical condition caused by neurotransmitters in the brain, and usually there is a genetic component," says Kerry.

### Do most people with ADHD end up in jail, drug addicts or social outcasts?

"Absolutely not. Richard Branson, Bill Gates, Mel Gibson, Tom Cruise, Sylvester Stallone, Albert Einstein and many more talented and creative people all had ADHD and/or learning difficulties," says Kerry.

"Once they learn strategies to focus they can harness their brilliant creative strengths."

### Is ADHD fairly uncommon?

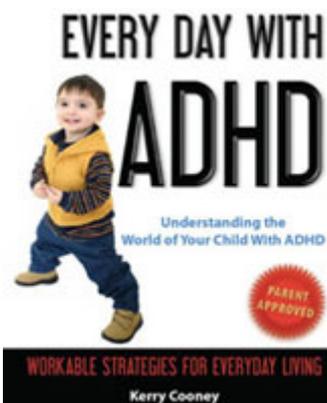
"No. About 11 per cent of Aussie children and adolescents have ADHD according to a recent National Survey of Mental Health. There is a higher prevalence in boys. Many adults have it too."

### Top tips

Remember the ratios of positive to negative comments that the average person requires for healthy self esteem is three to one.

Make this the goal for your child.

- Comment on the good stuff. When they walk through a doorway, say "Thank you for not slamming the door."
- Set limits ahead of time. For instance: "The rule is no Playstation on school nights. That is Monday to Thursday." Get them to agree before hand and the battle's over before it started.
- Use disciplinary actions sparingly. "Rewarding good behaviour straight away will have a stronger effect," says Kerry. "If discipline is required for say, hitting a sibling, then state the rule firmly and simply, go straight into a time out situation (in their room) with no discussion."
- Use whiteboards, fridge lists, planners and routine to help your child.
- Keep meal times and bedtimes consistent and encourage exercise.
- Break up big tasks. Don't say: "Clean your room". Say: "Put the towels in the basket and then make your bed".
  - Offer only two choices and be comfortable with either being chosen.
- ADHD kids are grazers. Leave a plate of food with bite sized pieces they can access.



### Did you know?

According to the Pediatrics Journal, three hours of television a day makes children 30 per cent more likely to have ADHD. Aim to limit your child's media activities to one hour per day.

**Kerry's book *Every Day With ADHD* is available for \$32.95 at good book stores.**

### Your say

Share your experiences with ADHD below...