

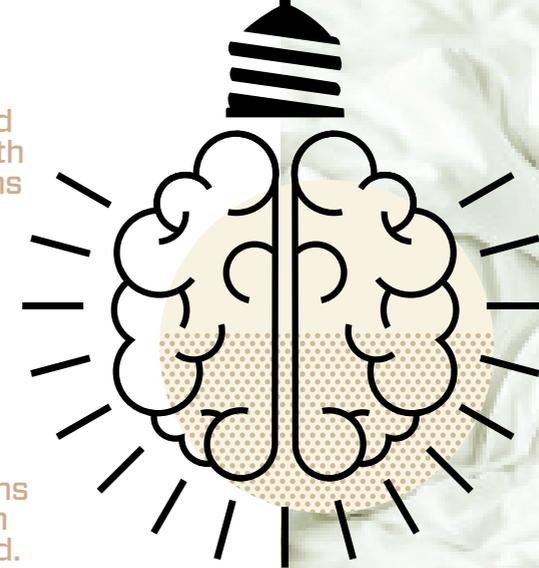
out of focus

One of the misunderstood disorders of the modern world, ADHD is affecting more and more people in SA. Before you think it's just the number of times you fiddle with your phone in a day, this is what ADHD actually is

By ROSHAAN PATEL

ATTENTION DEFICIT/ HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

(or more commonly referred to as ADHD) is a disorder with symptoms such as problems with staying focused and paying attention, difficulty controlling behaviour, and being overactive. Although a common childhood disorder, it can continue through adolescence and into adulthood. Durban-based psychologist and life coach Claire Newton explains what ADHD is and how it can be recognised and managed.



Symptoms

People with the disorder often display these traits:

- > Do not pay close attention to detail or make careless mistakes in schoolwork, work or other activities
- > Have difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or activities
- > Do not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- > Do not follow instructions and fail to finish schoolwork, chores or duties in the workplace
- > Difficulty organising tasks and activities
- > Easily distracted by unrelated stimuli
- > Forgetful in daily activities.

The Different Types of ADHD

There are three main types of ADHD:

1. Predominantly inattentive with little sign of impulsivity and hyperactivity;
2. Predominantly impulsive and hyperactive with little or no attention difficulties; and
3. Combined – easily distracted, hyperactive and impulsive.

What Causes ADHD?

According to ADHASA, the exact cause of ADHD is unknown, but it is understood to be a neurological disorder, which means that there is an imbalance of certain neurotransmitters. Along with this, it is biochemical, so those with ADHD have a deficiency in prostaglandins E1 and E3 (PE1 and PE3); and it is 80% a genetic condition.

At What Age Can ADHD Be Diagnosed?

Diagnosis should only take place from age five to seven, but some of the symptoms could be present at birth. It's crucial that the symptoms be present for a period of more than six months in all situations. The symptoms will usually appear before the age of seven, but diagnosis may only take place much later.

Adult ADHD

ADHD symptoms can develop in early childhood and continue into adulthood. In particular

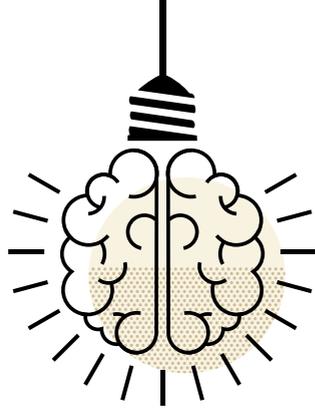
SLEEP ON IT

Claire emphasises the importance of sleep for both children and adults.

Many children today don't actually have ADHD. Their symptoms are a sign of sleep deprivation, which will manifest itself in a child's behaviour. Behavioural signs of sleepiness range from the classic ones (yawning, rubbing eyes) and externalising behaviours (hyperactivity, aggressiveness), to mood swings and inattentiveness. Many sleep disorders are important causes of symptoms that may overlap with the key symptoms of ADHD. Children with ADHD should be regularly and systematically assessed for sleep problems. 'My experience when talking to parents is that most children are not getting enough sleep,' says Claire.

instances, the condition is not diagnosed until the person is an adult. According to the Mayo Clinic, adult ADHD symptoms may not be as clear as in kids. 'In adults, hyperactivity may decrease, but impulsiveness, restlessness and difficulty to pay attention may continue.' Sufferers may also experience difficulties with sustaining relationships, poor work performance, low self-esteem, and other issues.

A number of adults with the condition don't realise they have it – they just know that everyday tasks can prove to be a challenge. Adults with ADHD may find it difficult to focus and prioritise tasks, leading to missed deadlines and forgotten meetings or social plans. The inability to control impulses can range from impatience in traffic or a queue, to mood swings and outbursts of anger.



WITH TREATMENT, MOST PEOPLE WITH ADHD CAN BE SUCCESSFUL IN SCHOOL OR WORK AND LEAD PRODUCTIVE LIVES

What ADHD Is Not

Just because you find yourself easily distracted and reaching for your phone every minute, does not mean that you have ADHD. According to the Mayo Clinic, most people have some symptoms similar to ADHD at some point in their lives. 'If your difficulties are recent or only occurred occasionally in

the past, you probably don't have ADHD. It is diagnosed only when symptoms are severe enough to cause ongoing issues in more than one area of your life. Persistent and disruptive symptoms can be traced back to early childhood.' If you are experiencing symptoms and they are disrupting your daily life, chat to your doctor.

Treatment

Clinical experience has shown that the most effective treatment for ADHD is a combo of dietary intervention, medication, the necessary supplementation, exercise, therapy or counselling to learn adaptive behaviours and coping skills, according to ADHASA.

While treatment can relieve many of the symptoms, there is no cure. The available treatment is aimed at managing ADHD – reducing the severity of the symptoms and helping people function more “normally”, says Claire.

The Mayo Clinic says that treatment for adult ADHD is similar to treatment for childhood ADHD, though some medications approved for children are not approved for adults.

The treatment for adult ADHD includes medication, psychological counselling and

treatment for any mental health conditions that could occur with ADHD. With treatment, most people with ADHD can be successful in school or work and lead productive lives.

GOLDBLOCKS AND THE BEAR FOUNDATION

At least one in 20 children in SA suffer from ADHD, according to the Foundation, who was the first initiative in SA to offer non-profit ADHD screening and intervention in underprivileged communities. This will ensure early referral, diagnosis and treatment, and improve the quality of life for these children. The foundation focuses on raising awareness of ADHD; increasing knowledge about it; providing training to parents, teachers, and healthcare workers; providing screening and the early identification of ADHD in children at schools; referring them for timely intervention and treatment; and capturing statistics on the prevalence and management of ADHD in South African children. gb4adhd.co.za

INFANTS

(3-11 MONTHS)
9-12 hours during the night and 30-minute to 2-hour naps, 1-4 times a day

TODDLERS

(1-3 YEARS)
12-14 hours

PRE-SCHOOLERS

(3-5 YEARS)
11-13 hours

SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

(5-12 YEARS)
10-11 hours

TEENS

(11-17 YEARS)
8-10 hours

ADULTS

7-9 hours

OLDER ADULTS

7-9 hours



How Much Sleep Do You Need?

NEWBORNS

(1-2 MONTHS)
10.5-18 hours

TIPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD STAY FOCUSED

X Keep to the same schedule every day, from waking up to going to bed. Make time for homework, outdoor play and indoor activities. Keep the schedule where both you and your child can see it – perhaps on the fridge or on a notice-board in the kitchen. Make changes as far in advance as possible.

X Organise everyday items. Have a place for everything, and keep every item in its place.

X Use homework and notebook organisers. Help your child understand the importance of writing down assignments and bringing home the necessary books.

X Be clear and consistent. Children with ADHD need consistent rules they can understand and follow.

X Give praise or rewards when rules are followed. They often receive, and thus come to expect, criticism. Pay attention to good behaviour and praise it. FL

Managing A Child With ADHD

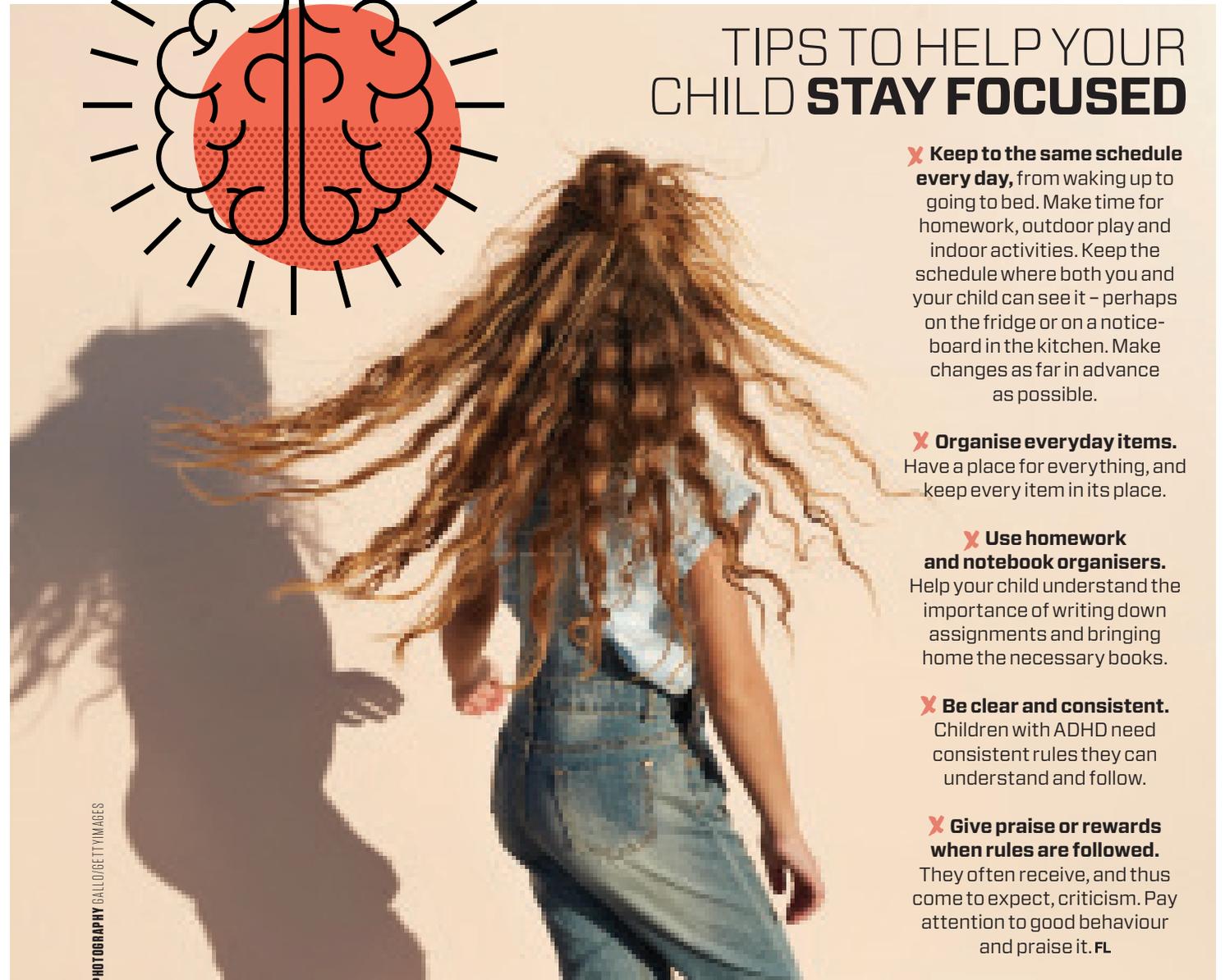
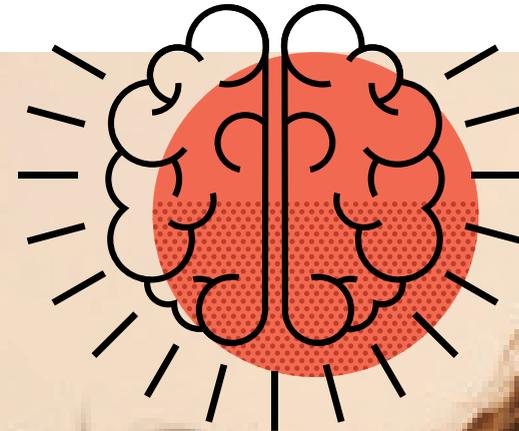
This can be challenging, but there are things that you as a parent can do to help your child:

- Introduce the rewards and consequences system: Rewards for appropriate behaviour and attitudes, and consequences for undesirable behaviour (such as the temporary removal of an enjoyed activity).
- Give immediate and positive feedback for behaviour you want to encourage, and ignore

behaviour that needs to be discouraged.

- Share a pleasant or relaxing activity with your child – play a board game, kick a ball around or bake cupcakes. Notice and point out what the child does well, and praise their strengths and abilities.
- Restrict the number of playmates to one or two at a time, so they aren't overstimulated.
- Help your child divide large tasks into smaller, more manageable ones.

- Learn stress-management techniques to help you deal with frustration. In this way, you'll be able to respond more calmly to your child's behaviour.
- Sometimes, the whole family may need therapy to find better ways to handle the child's disruptive behaviour, and also how to encourage behavioural changes.
- Join a support group of other parents with similar problems and concerns.



PHOTOGRAPHY GALLO/GETTY IMAGES