

Studying with attention deficit- hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Facts & Figures, Focus points, Tips and Tricks



1. Facts & Figures

- Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder first **emerges during childhood**.
- Characteristic features are the **difficulties with sustaining attention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity**. There can be a predominantly inattentive presentation, a predominantly hyperactive/impulsive presentation or a combined presentation.
- In Belgium the number of adults with ADHD is estimated at **4,1%**. For every two women, there are three men with ADHD.
- Students with ADHD can differ a great deal and symptoms **vary with age**. While the inattentiveness tends to persist, the symptoms of hyperactivity/ impulsivity evolve to symptoms of inner restlessness when puberty sets in:
 - Giving attention to **details** or **sustaining attention** is difficult. Besides great inattentiveness, moments of **hyperfocus** are possible.
 - There can be difficulties with **organizing tasks and activities**, meeting deadlines and **fulfilling obligations**.
 - **Inner restlessness**, starting and ending activities impulsively, difficulties slowing oneself down, talking excessively, difficulties to wait ones turn, difficulties sitting still, answering questions before there are finished, or responding in an inadequate manner can be present.
 - Often **associated problems** are present. These can be related to study skills, planning and time management, or maintaining personal relationships. Stress, anxiety, fatigue and overload are common.

2. Focus points, Tips and Tricks

□ Attending classes

Focus points

- **Being in time** for classes can be a challenge due to impulsive behavior or difficulties with time management.
- Due to the distractibility by external stimuli and inner thoughts, **staying focused** is difficult. Times of hyperfocus are alternated with times of strong distractibility.
- Due to difficulties sustaining attention, the **essence of classes** is often missed and **instructions** are misunderstood, not remembered or ignored.
- Taking full and clear **notes** during classes can be problematic.
- Impulsivity can lead to **rash reactions**. Answers are sometimes formulated before the lecturer has terminated his question. **Taking turns and sitting still** for long periods of time can be difficult.

Tips and tricks

- Incorporating **breaks during classes** can help to sustain attention longer.
- Preferences for a **specific location** in the classroom can help decrease the distraction.
- A **well-structured course and PowerPoint**, that is **provided beforehand**, can help sustain attention, and facilitate the discrimination of key issues from side issues.
- Applying **activating work form** during classes can help sustain attention.
- When difficulties with taking full and clear notes are present, a **training in note taking** can have substantial added value. Taking copies of structures notes from fellow students can be supportive.

□ Planning and organizing study-related activities

Focus points

- Getting a **clear overview on all study activities** can be difficult.
- Making and following a **study plan** is not obvious.

- ❑ Prioritizing and making time estimations can be difficult which leads to [deadlines being missed](#).
- ❑ [Study materials](#) can [get lost](#) leading to an increase in time pressure.

Tips and tricks

- ❑ Providing an [overview of all assignments and tasks](#) helps to create an overview and make an efficient study plan.
- ❑ [Study coaching](#) can be useful to help set up a realistic and efficient study plan and time schedule.
- ❑ Frequently [monitoring progress](#) is motivating.

❑ Processing and rehearsing study materials

Focus points

- ❑ Motivating oneself to study can be difficult. [Procrastination](#) is common.
- ❑ There can be difficulties getting the essence of the course and [discriminating the key issues](#) from side issues.
- ❑ [Self-testing strategies](#) are possibly less well developed.

Tips and tricks

- ❑ Stating the [learning goals](#) very explicitly and providing [sample questions](#) can be useful to help process the content and enhance self-testing strategies.
- ❑ During study coaching the focus can be put on learning [techniques that help discriminate key issues from side issues](#) and [structure the learning content](#). Teaching strategies that facilitate [self-testing](#) are useful.

❑ Assignments

Focus points

- ❑ Interpreting [instructions of an assignment](#) correctly can be difficult due to an impulsive start of the assignment or large distractibility.
- ❑ Finishing [assignments in time](#) and conveying a [message in a concise and coherent manner](#) can be a focus point.
- ❑ [Large assignments](#) can be difficult because of a lack of overview. Assignments are therefore postponed and deadlines are not met.

Tips and tricks

- Giving **clear and unambiguous** instructions can play an effective supportive role in helping understand the assignment and identify the expectations. Besides elaborating on the assignment in class, the instructions are also best given **in writing**.
- Checking whether the **assignment was understood** is supportive.
- **Agreements** should be made on how to contact the lecturer in case of questions (after class, via email, digitally, ...).
- For large assignments such as a bachelor- or master theses extra **intermediate and explicit feedback** can be necessary. **Breaking down the assignment in subcomponents with separate deadlines** can also play an effective supporting role.
- In case of **group assignments**, groups are best assembled with the support of the lecturer. Frequently checking up on the groups to identify support needs is also advisable.

□ Exams

Focus points

- Correctly **interpreting instructions** of an assignment can be difficult.
- Giving a **well-structured answer** can be difficult.
- Finishing an **exam on time** can be difficult.

Tips and tricks

- Using **ear plugs** can help minimize background noise. Making exams in a **smaller room** or being assigned to a **specific location in the exam room** can help minimize the distraction.
- Formulating **clear and unambiguous questions** helps to understand the question.
- **Rephrasing questions** helps to verify whether the question is understood correctly.
- **Extra preparation time** at an oral or written exam allows to compensate for the distractibility.

- An additional **oral presentation** at a written exam can help to clarify the responses and eliminate ambiguities.
- An **optimal spread of exams** within an exam period can help accommodate for the cognitive overload.

□ Internships

Focus points

- The **transfer from theory to practice** can be difficult. The link between what is taught in class and the new context of the internship can be perceived as difficult.
- **Instructions and feedback** are not always well understood, especially when these are formulated vaguely. Planning the different steps that need to be taken in order to bring the assignment to a successful conclusion can be difficult.

Tips and tricks

- The **expectations of the internship** and information on the **internship context** are best communicated well in advance.
- **Clarifying the link between the study content and the work field** can play an effective supporting role.
- **Learning goals are best formulated concretely** and explicitly to provide optimal learning opportunities for the student.
- **Intermediate steps** that need to be taken to bring the assignment to a successful conclusion are best **described** explicitly.

□ Student life

Focus points

- Establishing new **routines and structure** in daily activities is not easy due to intermediate spare hours or independent living. Getting up in time, spending spare hours usefully, incorporating independent study are not easy.
- **Additional problems** such as fatigue, stress, anxiety and low self-esteem are possible.
- Maintaining **social contacts** can be challenging.

Tips and tricks

- Support in the development of new routines and structure in daily activities can make a great difference.
- A fixed contact person in the study program can help monitor the load limit and help look for solutions in case of difficulties.
- Staff members of student facilities provide for coaching in case of psycho-social problems.