ADHD in Teens

It's not just a childhood thing—it grows with them

What is ADHD?

ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects focus, impulse control, and emotional regulation. While it's often diagnosed in childhood, the symptoms can become more complex in adolescence.
In teens, ADHD may not look like "hyperactivity."
It often shows up as:

- Struggling to manage time
- Forgetting assignments or losing track of deadlines
- Feeling easily overwhelmed
- Impulsive decision-making
- Low frustration tolerance
- Internal restlessness or anxiety

Common Signs of ADHD in Teens

- Difficulty starting or completing schoolwork
- Poor time management or procrastination
- Forgetfulness, losing items (like phones, keys, homework)
- Trouble focusing during conversations or classes
- Emotional outbursts, irritability, or low self-esteem
- Risk-taking or impulsive behaviors (especially in social settings)
- Difficulty with sleep, especially falling or staying asleep

These behaviors are not laziness or carelessness—they're signs of a brain that struggles to filter and organize input effectively.

What's Happening in the Teenage Brain?

Teen years come with huge emotional, social, and hormonal shifts. For teens with ADHD, this means:

- Executive function is still developing—making planning, organization, and decision-making harder
- Increased pressure from school, peers, and future planning can trigger anxiety or emotional dysregulation
- ADHD symptoms may worsen or look different during this stage

Treatment Options That Help

There's no one-size-fits-all approach, but with the right supports, teens with ADHD can succeed and thrive.

1. Behavioral Therapy

- Helps teens understand how ADHD affects them
- Builds coping skills, emotional regulation, and organization strategies
- Often includes parent coaching for consistency at home

2. Medication (when appropriate)

- Stimulants (like methylphenidate or amphetamines) and non-stimulant options are commonly used
- Medication isn't a cure, but it can help with focus, impulsivity, and emotional balance
- Best used in combination with therapy and lifestyle changes

3. Academic Support & Accommodations

- IEPs or 504 plans can help with extended test times, quiet workspaces, and assignment flexibility
- Breaking tasks into smaller steps can make schoolwork feel manageable

4. Lifestyle & Routine

- Prioritize **sleep**, balanced meals, and regular exercise
- Use **visual schedules, planners, or digital tools** to support time management
- Encourage structured downtime—creative outlets, nature, or movement-based hobbies can help regulate energy and mood

5. Supportive Communication

- ADHD teens often feel "different" or frustrated with themselves

Validate their struggles, encourage open dialogue, and avoid framing behaviors as failures.

When to Seek Help

If your teen is **falling behind at school**, struggling with friendships, **feeling anxious or withdrawn**, or showing signs of low self-worth, don't wait. Early support makes a big difference.

A Note from Dr. Baweja

ADHD doesn't go away in the teen years—but neither does a teen's capacity to thrive with the right support.
The goal isn't perfection—it's helping them build the tools they need to feel understood, empowered, and confident in their own brain.