

Information sheet, AD(H)S in adulthood

Tips for faculty members and advisors

Students with a disability or chronic illness have special needs which cannot always be recognised and interpreted at first sight. This information sheet is intended to provide you with specialist knowledge for open and sympathetic communication in your dealings with the students concerned, and to contribute towards understanding and improving the situation of students with impairments.

Diagnosis and functional description

The attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a disorder that is not merely limited to childhood and which individually impacts on adult persons' way of living and learning in a wide variety of ways.

ADHD is a neurobiological development disorder. It manifests itself through impairments in the field of attention, impulse control and emotion regulation. Sometimes, sufferers also display a strong physical restlessness (hyperactivity).

Although the hyperkinetic symptoms frequently disappear with the approach of adulthood, attention problems may persist or, in an increasingly complex environment and growing demands, may become a strain for the first time. Comorbidities with other mental illnesses are not rare.

The effects of the impairment manifest themselves with regard to attentiveness and perseverance in the field of learning, for example, or in the organisation of functions and in time management. The results of limited attention and retentiveness are learning deficits despite good intelligence.

The disorder (classified under ICD-10: F90.0) has largely genetic causes. Depending on the person, however, it can have very different consequences since its individual progression is also influenced by environmental factors. A usable and valid ADHD diagnosis can only be made by medical specialists or psychologists with sufficient specialist knowledge.

Effects in the academic environment and on academically relevant activities

- Students with AD(H)D frequently have an increased need for structuring. They welcome it if teaching materials and examination documents are well structured by means of a clear arrangement, emphases and summaries, and if priorities are set clearly.
- Students with AD(H)D may have difficulty concentrating for a lengthy period of time. When they learn things, they primarily memorise contents well which are interesting and have a visual, auditive or emotional appeal. Try to make use of didactic diversity and to ensure that your presentations appeal to two senses whenever possible (for instance acoustically and with visual media). This may improve attention throughout a longer period of time.

- Students concerned can be easily distracted by noises and other stimuli. Therefore, it may make sense if students with AD(H)D can occupy a quiet marginal seat or a seat at the very front of the examination or lecture room.
- Try to exercise a certain degree of goodwill if an appointment for a meeting or a deadline has been forgotten, and do not attribute it to a lack of interest. If possible, mention deadlines several times, both verbally and in writing.
- If possible, try to establish eye contact with the students when you are giving them instructions and, if necessary, repeat the instructions.
- Many students welcome it if they are provided with course documents in advance. In this way, they are able to apply their own, individually learned working techniques and, for instance, work on the document in the run-up to the course in order to be able to follow it better.
- Students with AD(H)D can easily get bogged down in tasks and suffer from learning blockages. It may be the case that with regard to written work, they will need support in prioritising and/or in the limitation of a topic. Regular meetings can help them to stay on the ball and support successful time management and thus successful studying.
- In oral examinations, it should be ensured that the questions are formulated with precision and in a goal-oriented manner. Students with AD(H)D welcome it if tasks are clearly structured.
- When revising for an examination, students with AD(H)D may find it difficult to learn the examination subject in a goal-oriented manner. Procrastination and delay may also be typical features of this impairment. Refer students to the Counselling & Coaching Team of *Student Services* to enable them to prepare themselves better for the examinations with individual learning coaching or a group service (learning workshops): <https://ethz.ch/students/en/advice/beratung-coaching.html>

Effects on performance assessments

Students who are affected by AD(H)D have the option of submitting an application for special arrangements with regard to **performance assessments** (information at www.ethz.ch/disability).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the staff at the Counselling and Coaching Centre. [Contact persons – student portal | ETH Zurich](#).