

Commonwealth Psychology Associates, LLC

Boston's Behavioral Health Specialists

www.commpsy.com

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: History of Related Terminology©

By Andrea Piatt, Ph.D.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is the same thing as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). It is a common misconception that the two terms reflect two types of attention-related problems. So, why do we have two different names for the same disorder? The use of two different names for the same disorder developed in large part out of evolving beliefs about the causes of the condition and differing approaches to diagnosis. The label that one chooses to use is, to some extent, simply a reflection of training background of the health care provider.

Most psychologists and other mental health professionals rely on a specific manual for diagnostic criteria and terminology: the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, now in its 4th edition (DSM-IV). In 1980, the 3rd edition of the DSM (DSM-III) introduced the term Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). In 1994, the current version of the DSM (DSM-IV) renamed the condition Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and there has been no alteration in the terminology since that time. Various sub-types further describe a person's particular set of symptoms.

In recent years, the term Attention Deficit Disorder has become less popular and the term Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder has become more widely used. In fact, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is the term used by the National Institute of Mental Health, a branch of the National Institute of Health, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a branch of the Department of Health and Human Services.

However, psychiatrists and medical doctors often rely on a manual called the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems*, now in its 10th edition (ICD-10). The developers of this manual first named the disorder Hyperkinetic Reaction of Childhood in 1968, suggesting that the problem was an emotional reaction rather than a neurological condition. However, over the years it has become clear that ADHD is a neurobehavioral condition related to various brain structures and to neuro-chemical functioning. As such, the name was later changed and today the ICD manual uses the term Hyperkinetic Syndrome of Childhood to describe the overall condition, with the term Attention Deficit Disorder serving as a sub-type of the larger category.

Regardless of the diagnostic label, what is important to know is that the larger label or category is not the end of the story. Both diagnostic labels break the diagnosis down into subtypes that characterize an individual's problems more precisely. For example, the DSM-IV manual codes and categorizes the various subtypes as follows:

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- Predominantly Inattentive Type
- Predominantly Hyperactive Type
- Combined Type

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified

(This category is used when an individual has various symptoms of ADHD but does not meet all the criteria required for one of the diagnoses listed above)

Whereas, the ICD-10 codes and categorizes the various subtypes as follows:

Hyperkinetic Syndrome of Childhood:

- Attention deficit disorder Attention deficit without hyperactivity Attention deficit with hyperactivity
- Hyperkinetic Conduct Disorder

Whichever terminology one chooses to use, what is most important is that one receives the correct diagnosis. Additionally, identifying the correct subtype is important because different symptoms respond differently to medications and treatments. To learn more about diagnostic testing for ADHD, please refer to our ADHD Testing and Neuropsychological Testing pages.