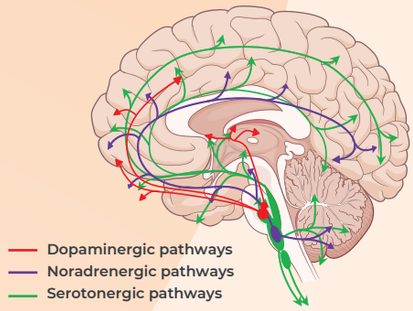
# Executive Dysfunction And Emotional Dysregulation In ADHD

## Presentation, Assessment, And Management

**ADHD is a chronic neurodevelopmental disorder affecting both children and adults, characterized by[1-4]:**

- Core symptoms: inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsivity
- Associated features: executive dysfunction and emotional dysregulation
- Major comorbidities: anxiety and depression*

Traditional medications may not fully address all aspects of ADHD neurobiology and clinical presentation, and many individuals with ADHD experience residual symptoms of executive dysfunction and emotional dysregulation despite treatment[5-8]




## SYMPTOMS AND PREVALENCE OF EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION

Executive dysfunction is the impaired regulation of cognition and behavior, resulting in deficits in self-monitoring, task initiation, and behavioral inhibition[9-11]

### SYMPTOMS INCLUDE[9-13]:

**Working Memory**
Difficulties with time management, forgetting instructions or items, losing train of thought

**Task Initiation And Management**
Difficulty starting or switching tasks, procrastination

**Inhibitory Control**
Interrupting or blurting out, impulsive actions (eg. spending), difficulty stopping behaviors

**Executive dysfunction may be as common as core symptoms in adults[13,14] and children with ADHD[15†]**

## SYMPTOMS AND PREVALENCE OF EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION

Emotional dysregulation is the impaired ability to process and control emotions and to regulate emotional responses[16,17]

### SYMPTOMS INCLUDE[16-21]:

**Emotional Lability**
Frustration, abrupt mood shifts, sudden dysphoria/sadness

**Irritability**
Easily annoyed or angered, rapid emotional shifts, verbal outbursts

**Emotional Reactivity and Rejection Sensitivity**
Hypersensitivity to criticism, strong responses to minor triggers, impulsive outbursts (followed by regret), low self-esteem

**Duration and Recovery**
Difficulty calming down, prolonged emotional responses, holding onto anger

**Up to 45% of children and up to 70% of adults with ADHD have emotional dysregulation symptoms[18,19]**

**Executive dysfunction and emotional dysregulation are interdependent in ADHD, as executive failures often trigger emotional reactions; together, they reflect impairments in self-regulation that contribute significantly to functional deficits and distress.[9,22,23]**

## ASSESSMENT: A MULTIMETHOD APPROACH

No standard approaches exist for assessing executive dysfunction and emotional dysregulation in ADHD. Clinical assessment and monitoring rely mainly on clinical interviews, semi-structured questionnaires, and observation.[24-29]

### Clinical Interviews and Observation[26]

- Semistructured exploration of real-world self-management
- Collection of detailed examples of emotional and interpersonal challenges
- Assessment of quality of life and function at work/school and home and in social situations

### Behavior Rating Scales[27,28]

Limited use due to length and complexity

**Examples:**

- BRIEF-A (EF)
- CAARS (EF/ED)
- WRAADDS (ED)
- DERS†† (ED)

*Additional major comorbidities include sleep disorders and SUDs.
†Based on a study of 136 children with ADHD (n=55) or without ADHD (n=81).[15]
††Not specific to ADHD.[28]
ADHD, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder; BRIEF-A, Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Function–Adult Version; CAARS, Conners Adult ADHD Rating Scale; DERS, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale; ED, emotional dysregulation; EF, executive dysfunction; WRAADDS, Wender Reimherr Adult Attention Deficit Disorder Scale.

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