

ADHD Doctor? Psychologist? Therapist? Finding the Best Treatment Professional

Teaming up with the right doctor, psychiatrist, or other medical professional makes all the difference in managing ADHD symptoms successfully. Learn the benefits and limitations of each ADHD treatment professional.

Making Sense of ADHD Professionals

When you or your child has ADHD, chances are you will come across a variety of medical professionals and ADHD specialists. Each has something different to contribute to your care. It can be hard to sort out who does what and who you should see when you have ADHD. The more you know, the better.

The Family Doctor

Your family doctor, also known as your primary-care physician, is responsible for your overall health care. Some FDs have elected to take additional courses to learn more about ADHD and are qualified to treat ADHD. Others offer only basic care and refer you to a specialist for further ADHD treatment.

For Kids: The Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrician

A pediatrician who believes your child has developmental challenges will refer you to a developmental and behavioral pediatrician. This doctor will look to see whether there is anything unusual about your child's body. She will examine the nervous system, noting physical strength and coordination as well as behavior, social responsiveness, and speech. This doctor usually coordinates the testing your child may need.

The Psychiatrist

A psychiatrist has completed medical school and received specialized education and training in diagnosing and treating emotional disorders, such as ADHD, depression, bipolar disorder, and anxiety. Psychiatrists understand the complex relationship between physical and emotional disorders and work with you to create a treatment plan. They are medical doctors and *can* prescribe medication.

The Psychopharmacologist

A psychopharmacologist is a medical doctor (either an M.D., D.O., or psychiatrist) who specializes in pharmacology to treat mental and emotional disorders. While you may not see a psychopharmacologist on a regular basis, your ADHD professional team may choose to consult with one about your medical care.

The Psychologist

A psychologist has received an advanced degree in psychology (Ph.D. or Psy.D). Although a Ph.D. traditionally was trained for research or academia work, today many are clinical psychologists and treat patients. State laws for licensing of psychologists vary. In most states, psychologists *cannot* prescribe medication but *can* diagnose ADHD. The main treatment method used by psychologists is talk therapy.

The Therapist and Counselor

Therapists and counselors specialize in therapy, such as talk therapy. They have at least a master's degree in either psychology or counseling. Some have elected to receive additional specialized training to complete an initial assessment of ADHD, but most will refer patients to a psychologist or psychiatrist for assessment. They *cannot* prescribe medication.

The Neurologist

A neurologist is a medical doctor who specializes in disorders of the brain and nervous system. While neurologists may play a role in the diagnostic process, such as testing for or treating a coexisting seizure disorder, brain tumor, or Tourette's syndrome, they do not normally diagnose mental and emotional disorders.

For Kids: The Neuropsychologist

A neuropsychologist has special training in the biological and neurological bases of learning and thought. The neuropsychologist assesses your child's level of cognitive and behavioral functioning. A neuropsychologist makes recommendations about school placement and overall care of the child.

The Psychiatric Nurse

Psychiatric nurses work in psychiatric hospitals and treatment centers as patient advocates and crisis intervention specialists. They have completed a degree in nursing and received additional specialized training and education in working with patients with mental and emotional disorders. They *do not* diagnose ADHD and *cannot* prescribe medication.

The Nurse Practitioner

Nurse practitioners usually work with primary-care physicians. They have completed their nursing degree and received additional specialized training in diagnosing and treating illness. Most have limited knowledge of ADHD—they often know more about childhood ADHD than adult ADHD. Depending on state laws, they may be able to prescribe medication.

The Social Worker

Social workers are usually employed by an agency or hospital. They counsel patients and clients of the agency. They *can* diagnose ADHD, but *cannot* prescribe medication. Social workers are often helpful in locating resources and community services for patients. They also give emotional support to patients and their families.

For Kids: The Occupational Therapist

The occupational therapist assesses your child's ability to use smaller muscles, like those of the hand or face. Dysgraphia (terrible handwriting) is a problem for many kids with ADHD that an OT addresses. The OT will also look at your child's sensitivity to sensory stimulation—like a child who cannot stand to have the tag on the neck of his shirt rubbing against his skin.

The ADHD Coach

An ADHD coach is not a medical professional. There are no standards for licensing coaches currently, but certification programs do exist. Coaches are also bound to a code of ethics and to core competencies. Coaches are not able to diagnose ADHD or prescribe medications. They work with individuals to improve specific lifestyle skills, such as organization, and to find ways to better manage ADHD symptoms.
