

# Adult ADD / ADHD Help Guide

## Tips for Managing Symptoms & Getting Focused



If you have ADD/ADHD, everything from paying the bills on time to keeping up with work, family, and social demands can seem overwhelming. But it's possible to get focused and turn chaos into calm. By taking advantage of self-help techniques, you can become more productive, organized, and in control of your life—and improve your sense of self-worth.

### Managing adult ADD / ADHD: What you need to know

Adult ADD/ADHD can present challenges across all areas of life, from getting organized at home to reaching your potential at work. It can be tough on your health and both your personal and on-the-job relationships. Your symptoms may lead to extreme procrastination, trouble making deadlines, and impulsive behavior. In addition, you may feel that friends and family don't understand what you're up against.

Fortunately, there are skills you can learn to help get your symptoms of ADD/ADHD under control. You can improve your daily habits, learn to recognize and use your strengths, and develop techniques that help you work more efficiently, increase organization, and interact better with others. Change won't happen overnight, though. These ADD/ADHD self-help strategies require practice, patience, and, perhaps most importantly, a positive attitude.

### Adult ADD / ADHD self-help myths

You may be holding onto misconceptions about how much you can help yourself with adult ADD/ADHD.

#### **MYTH: Medication is the only way to solve my ADD/ADHD.**

- **FACT:** While medication can help some people manage the symptoms ADD/ADHD, it is not a cure, nor the only solution. If used at all, it should be taken alongside other treatments or self-help strategies.

#### **MYTH: Having ADD/ADHD means I'm lazy or unintelligent, so I won't be able to help myself.**

- **FACT:** The effects of ADD/ADHD may have led to you and others labeling you this way, but the truth is that you are not unmotivated or unintelligent—you have a disorder that gets in the way of certain normal functions. In fact, adults with ADD/ADHD often have to find very smart ways to compensate for their disorder.

**MYTH: A health professional can solve all my ADD/ADHD problems.**

- **FACT:** Health professionals can help you manage symptoms of ADD/ADHD, but they can only do so much. You're the one living with the problems, so you're the one who can make the most difference in overcoming them.

**MYTH: ADD/ADHD is a life sentence—I'll always suffer from its symptoms.**

- **FACT:** While it is true that there is no cure for ADD/ADHD, there is a lot you can do to reduce the problems it causes. Once you become accustomed to using strategies to help yourself, you may find that managing your symptoms becomes second nature.

## **Adult ADD/ADHD self-help: Tips for getting organized and controlling clutter**

The hallmark traits of ADD/ADHD—inattention and distractibility—make organization perhaps the biggest challenge adults with the disorder face. If you have adult ADD/ADHD, the prospect of getting organized, whether it be at work or home, may leave you feeling overwhelmed.

However, you can learn to break tasks down into smaller steps and follow a systematic approach to organization. By implementing various structures and routines, and taking advantage of tools such as daily planners and reminders, you can maintain organization and control clutter.

### **Develop structure and neat habits—and keep them up**

To organize a room, home, or office, categorize your objects, deciding which are necessary and which can be stored or discarded. To organize yourself, get in the habit of taking notes and writing lists. Maintain your newly organized structure with regular, daily routines.

- **Create space.** Ask yourself what you need on a daily basis, and find storage bins or closets for things you don't. Designate specific areas for things like keys, bills, and other items that can be easily misplaced. Throw away things you don't need.
- **Use a calendar app or day planner.** Effective use of a day planner or a calendar on your smartphone or computer can help you remember appointments and deadlines. With electronic calendars, you can also set up automatic reminders so scheduled events don't slip your mind.

- **Use lists.** Make use of lists and notes to keep track of regularly scheduled tasks, projects, deadlines, and appointments. If you decide to use a daily planner, keep all lists and notes inside it. You also have many options for use on your smartphone or computer. Search for “to do” apps or task managers.
- **Deal with it now.** You can avoid forgetfulness, clutter, and procrastination by filing papers, cleaning up messes, or returning phone calls immediately, not sometime in the future. If a task can be done in two minutes or less, do it on the spot, rather than putting it off for later.

## Tame your ADD/ADHD paper trail

If you have adult ADD / ADHD, a major part of your disorganization might be with paperwork—in endless piles or strewn across your kitchen, desk, or office. Take an afternoon to set up a paperwork system that works for you.

- **Set up a filing system.** Use dividers or separate file folders for different types of documents (such as medical records, receipts, and income statements). Label and color-code your files so that you can find what you need quickly.
- **Deal with mail on a daily basis.** Set aside a few minutes each day to deal with the mail, preferably as soon as you bring it inside. It helps to have a designated spot where you can sort the mail and either trash it, file it, or act on it.
- **Go paperless.** Minimize the amount of paper you have to deal with. Request electronic statements and bills instead of paper copies. You can also reduce junk mail by opting out of the Direct Marketing Association's (DMA) Mail Preference Service.

## Adult ADD / ADHD self-help: Managing your time and staying on schedule

Trouble with time management is a common effect of adult ADD/ADHD. You may frequently lose track of time, miss deadlines, procrastinate, underestimate how much time you need for tasks, or find yourself doing things in the wrong order. Many adults with ADD/ADHD spend so much time on one task—known as “hyperfocusing”—that nothing else gets done. These difficulties can leave you feeling frustrated and inept, and make others impatient, but there are solutions to help you better manage your time.

### Time management tips for adult ADD/ADHD

Adults with attention deficit disorder often have a different perception of how time passes. To align your sense of time with everyone else, use the oldest trick in the book: a clock.

- **Become a clock-watcher.** Use a wristwatch or highly visible wall or desk clock to help you keep track of time. When you start a task, make a note of the time by saying it out loud or writing it down.

- **Use timers.** Allot yourself limited amounts of time for each task and use a timer or alarm to alert you when your time is up. For longer tasks, consider setting an alarm to go off at regular intervals to keep you productive and aware of how much time is going by.
- **Give yourself more time than you think you need.** Adults with ADD/ADHD are notoriously bad at estimating how long it will take to do something. For every thirty minutes of time you think it will take you to get someplace or complete a task, give yourself a cushion by adding ten minutes.
- **Plan to be early and set up reminders.** Write down appointments for fifteen minutes earlier than they really are. Set up reminders to ensure you leave on time and make sure you have everything you need ahead of time so you're not frantically looking for your keys or phone when it's time to go.

### **Prioritization tips for adult ADD/ADHD**

Because adults with ADD/ADHD often struggle with impulse control and jump from one subject to another, completing tasks can be difficult and large projects can seem overwhelming. To overcome this:

- **Decide what's first.** Ask yourself what is the most important task you need to accomplish, and then order your other tasks after that one.
- **Take things one at a time.** Break down large projects or tasks into smaller, manageable steps.
- **Stay on task.** Avoid getting sidetracked by sticking to your schedule, using a timer to enforce it if necessary

### **Learn to say no**

Impulsiveness can lead adults with ADD/ADHD to agree to too many projects at work or make too many social engagements. But a jam-packed schedule can leave you feeling overwhelmed, overtired, and affect the quality of your work. Turning things down may improve your ability to accomplish tasks, keep social dates, and live a healthier lifestyle. Check your schedule first before committing to something new.

## **Adult ADD / ADHD self-help: Managing money and staying on top of bills**

Money management requires budgeting, planning, and organization, so for many adults with ADD/ADHD, it can be a true challenge. Many common systems of money management don't tend to work for adults with ADD/ADHD because they require too much time, too much paper, and too much attention to detail. But if you create your own system that is both simple and consistent, you can get on top of your finances and put a stop to overspending, overdue bills, and penalties for missed deadlines.

## Get in the driver's seat to control your budget

An honest assessment of your financial situation is the first step to getting budgeting under control. Start by keeping track of every expense, no matter how small, for a month (yes, thirty days). This will allow you to effectively analyze where your money is going. You may be surprised how much you're spending on unnecessary items and impulse purchases. You can then use this snapshot of your spending habits to create a monthly budget based on your income and needs.

Figure out what you can do to avoid straying from your budget. For example, if you're spending too much at restaurants, you can make an eating-in plan and factor in time for grocery shopping and meal preparation.

## Set up a simple money management and bill paying system

Establish an easy, organized system that helps you save documents, receipts, and stay on top of bills. For an adult with ADD/ADHD, the opportunity to do banking on the computer can be the gift that keeps on giving. Organizing money online means less paperwork, no messy handwriting, and no misplaced slips.

- **Switch to online banking.** Signing up for online banking can turn the hit-or-miss process of balancing your budget into a thing of the past. Your online account will list all deposits and payments, tracking your balance automatically, to the penny, every day. You can also set up automatic payments for your regular monthly bills and log on as needed to pay irregular and occasional ones. The best part: no misplaced envelopes or late fees.
- **Set up bill pay reminders.** If you prefer not to set up automatic payments, you can still make the process of bill paying easier with electronic reminders. You may be able to set up text or email reminders through online banking or you can schedule them in your calendar app.
- **Take advantage of technology.** Free services such as Mint and Manilla can help you keep track of your finances and accounts. Both services take some time to set up, but once you've linked your accounts they automatically update. Manilla consolidates your statements and bills from all of your accounts into one place. Mint tracks all of your bank account and credit card transactions, and also offers budgeting and other financial analysis tools. Both tools can make your financial life easier.

## Put a stop to impulse shopping

Impulsivity from ADD/ADHD and shopping can be a very dangerous combination. It can put you in debt and make you feel guilty and ashamed. You can prevent impulsive buys with a few strategic tactics.

- Shop with cash only—leave your checkbook and credit cards at home.

- Cut up all but one credit card. When you shop, make a list of what you need and stick to it.
- Use a calculator to keep a running total when shopping (hint: there's one on your cell phone).
- Stay away from places where you're likely to spend too much money.
- Throw away catalogs as they arrive.

## Adult ADD / ADHD self-help: Tips for staying focused and productive at work



ADD/ADHD can create special challenges at work. The things you may find toughest—organization, completion of tasks, sitting still, listening quietly—are the very things you're often asked to do all day long.

Juggling ADD/ADHD and a challenging job is no easy task, but by tailoring your workplace environment you can take advantage of your strong points while minimizing the negative impact of your ADD/ADHD symptoms.

### Get organized at work

Organize your office, cubicle, or desk one manageable step at a time. Then use the following strategies to stay tidy and organized:

- **Set aside daily time for organization.** Set aside 5 to 10 minutes a day to clear your desk and organize your paperwork. Experiment with storing things inside your desk or in bins so that they don't clutter your workspace as unnecessary distractions.
- **Use colors and lists.** Color-coding can be very useful to people with ADD/ADHD. Manage forgetfulness by writing everything down.
- **Prioritize.** More important tasks should be done first. Set deadlines for everything, even if they are self-imposed.

### End distractions

Let your workmates know you need to concentrate, and try the following techniques to minimize distractions:

- **Where you work matters.** If you don't have your own office, you may be able to take your work to an empty office or conference room. If you are in a lecture hall or conference, try sitting close to the speaker and away from people who chat mid-meeting.

- **Minimize external commotion.** Face your desk towards a wall and keep your workplace free of clutter. To discourage interruptions, you could even hang a "Do Not Disturb" sign. If possible, let voicemail pick up your phone calls and return them later. If noise distracts you, consider noise-canceling headphones or a sound machine
- **Save big ideas for later.** All those great concepts that keep popping into your head? Jot them down on paper for later consideration.

## Stretch your attention span

As an adult with ADD/ADHD, you **are** capable of focusing—it's just that you may have a hard time keeping that focus, especially when the activity isn't one that you find particularly engaging. Boring meetings or lectures are hard on anyone, but for adults with ADD/ADHD they can be a special challenge. Similarly, following multiple directions can also be difficult for those with ADD/ADHD. Use these tips to improve your focus and ability to follow instructions:

- **Get it in writing.** If you're attending a meeting, lecture, workshop, or another gathering that requires close attention, ask for an advance copy of the relevant materials—such as a meeting agenda or lecture outline. At the meeting, use the written notes to guide your active listening and note taking. Writing as you listen will help you stay focused on the speaker's words.
- **Echo directions.** After someone gives verbal instructions, say them aloud to be sure you got it right.
- **Move around.** To prevent restlessness and fidgeting, go ahead and move around—at the appropriate times in the right places. As long as you are not disturbing others, taking a walk or even jumping up and down during a meeting break, for example, can help you pay attention later on.

## Adult ADD/ADHD self-help: Tips for managing stress and boosting mood

Due to the impulsivity and disorganization that often accompany ADD/ADHD, you may struggle with erratic sleep, unhealthy eating, or the effects of too little exercise—all issues that can lead to extra stress, bad moods, and feeling out of control of your emotions. The best way to stop this cycle is to take charge of your lifestyle habits and create healthy new routines.

Eating well, getting plenty of sleep, and exercising regularly can help you stay calm, avoid mood swings, and in many cases fight the symptoms of anxiety and depression. Healthier habits can also reduce ADD/ADHD symptoms like inattention, hyperactivity, and distractibility, while regular routines can help your life feel more manageable.

## **Exercise and spend time outdoors for adult ADD/ADHD**

Working out is perhaps the most positive and efficient way to reduce hyperactivity and inattention from ADD/ADHD. Exercise can relieve stress, boost your mood, and calm your mind, helping work off the excess energy and aggression that can get in the way of relationships and feeling stable.

- Exercise on a daily basis.
- Choose something vigorous and fun that you can stick with, like a team sport or working out with a friend.
- Increase stress relief by exercising outdoors—people with ADD/ADHD often benefit from sunshine and green surroundings.
- As well as relieving stress, relaxation exercise, such as meditation, yoga, or tai chi, can teach you to better control your attention and impulses.

## **Get plenty of sleep for adult ADD/ADHD**

Sleep deprivation can increase symptoms of adult ADD/ADHD, reducing your ability to cope with stress and maintain focus during the day. Simple changes to daytime habits go a long way toward ensuring solid nightly sleep:

- Avoid caffeine late in the day.
- Exercise vigorously and regularly, but not within an hour of bedtime.
- Create a predictable and quiet “bedtime” routine.
- Take a hot shower or bath just before bed.
- Stick to a regular sleep-wake schedule, even on weekends.

## **Eat right for adult ADD/ADHD**

Eating healthfully can reduce distractibility, hyperactivity, and decrease stress levels dramatically.

- Eat small meals throughout day.
- Avoid sugar as much as possible.
- Eat fewer carbohydrates, while increasing your protein intake.



# Adult ADHD and Relationships

## Tips for Developing a Solid Partnership



Relationships where one or both members of the couple have ADD / ADHD can be troubled by misunderstandings, frustrations, and resentments. This is especially likely if the symptoms of ADD / ADHD have never been properly diagnosed or treated. The good news is that you can turn these problems around. You can build a healthier, happier partnership by learning about the role ADHD plays in your relationship and how both of you can choose more positive and productive ways to respond to challenges and communicate with each other.

## How ADD / ADHD can affect relationships

While the distractibility, disorganization, and impulsivity of adult ADD/ADHD can cause problems in many areas of life, these symptoms can be particularly damaging when it comes to your closest relationships.

**If you're the person with ADD/ADHD**, you may feel like you're constantly being criticized, nagged, and micromanaged. No matter what you do, nothing seems to please your spouse or partner. You don't feel respected as an adult, so you find yourself avoiding your partner or saying whatever you have to in order to get him or her off your back. You wish your significant other could relax even a little bit and stop trying to control every aspect of your life. You wonder what happened to the person you fell in love with.

**If you're in a relationship with someone who has ADD/ADHD**, you may feel lonely, ignored, and unappreciated. You're tired of taking care of everything on your own and being the only responsible party in the relationship. You don't feel like you can rely on your partner. He or she never seems to follow through on promises, and you're forced to constantly issue reminders and demands or else just do things yourself. Sometimes it feels as if your significant other just doesn't care.

It's easy to see how the feelings on both sides can contribute to a destructive cycle in the relationship. The non-ADHD partner complains, nags, and becomes increasingly resentful while the ADHD partner, feeling judged and misunderstood, gets defensive and pulls away. In the end, nobody is happy. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Transforming your relationship starts with understanding the role that ADD/ADHD plays. Once you are able to identify how the symptoms are ADD/ADHD are influencing your interactions as a couple, you can learn better ways of responding. For the partner with ADHD, this means learning how to manage the problematic symptom. For the non-ADHD partner, this means learning how to react to frustrations in ways that encourage and motivate your partner.

## **Symptoms of ADD/ADHD that can cause relationship problems**

- **Trouble paying attention.** If you have ADD/ADHD, you may zone out during conversations, which can make your partner feel ignored and devalued. You may also miss important details or mindlessly agree to something you don't remember later, which can be frustrating to others.
- **Forgetfulness.** Even when a person with ADD/ADHD is paying attention, he or she may later forget what was promised or discussed. When it's your spouse's birthday or the formula you said you'd pick up, your partner may start to feel like you don't care or you're unreliable.
- **Poor organizational skills.** This can lead to difficulty finishing tasks as well as general household chaos. Partners may feel like they're always cleaning up after the person with ADD/ADHD and shouldering a disproportionate amount of the family duties.
- **Impulsivity.** If you have ADD/ADHD, you may blurt things out without thinking, which can cause hurt feelings. This impulsivity can also lead to irresponsible and even reckless behavior (for example, making a big purchase that isn't in the budget, leading to fights over finances).
- **Emotional outbursts.** Many people with ADD/ADHD have trouble moderating their emotions. You may lose your temper easily and have trouble discussing issues calmly. Your partner may feel like he or she has to walk on eggshells to avoid blowups.

## **Adult ADHD and relationships: Put yourself in your partner's shoes**

The first step in turning your relationship around is learning to see things from your partner's perspective. If you've been together a long time or you've had the same fights again and again, you might think that you already understand where your partner is coming from.

But don't underestimate how easy it is to misinterpret your partner or spouse's actions and intentions. You and your partner are more different than you think—especially if only one of you has ADD/ADHD. And just because you've heard it all before doesn't mean you've truly taken in what your partner is saying. When emotions are running high, as they usually do around ADD/ADHD relationship issues, it's particularly difficult to maintain objectivity and perspective.

The best way to put yourself in your partner's shoes is to ask and then simply listen. Find a time to sit down and talk when you're not already upset. Let your partner describe how he or she

feels without interruption from you to explain or defend yourself. When your partner is finished, repeat back the main points you've heard him or her say, and ask if you understood correctly. You may want to write the points down so you can reflect on them later. When your partner is finished, it's your turn. Ask him or her to do the same for you and really listen with fresh ears and an open mind.

### **Tips for increasing empathy and understanding in your relationship**

- **Study up on ADD/ADHD.** The more both of you learn about ADD/ADHD and its symptoms, the easier it will be to see how it is influencing your relationship. You may find that a light bulb comes on. So many of your issues as a couple finally make sense! This understanding can help the non-ADHD partner take symptoms less personally. For the partner with ADHD, it can be a relief to understand what's behind some of your behaviors.
- **Acknowledge the impact your behavior has on your partner.** If you're the one with ADD/ADHD, it's important to recognize how your untreated symptoms affect your partner. If you're the non-ADHD partner, consider how your nagging and criticism makes your spouse feel. Don't dismiss your partner's complaints or disregard them because you don't like the way he or she brings it up or reacts to you.
- **Separate who your partner is from his or her symptoms or behaviors.** Instead of labeling your partner "irresponsible," recognize his or her forgetfulness and lack of follow-through as symptoms of ADD/ADHD. Remember, symptoms aren't character traits. That goes for the non-ADHD partner too. Recognize that nagging usually arises from feelings of frustration and stress, not because your partner is an unsympathetic harpy.

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### **How the partner with ADHD often feels:**

**Different.** The brain is often racing, and people with ADHD experience the world in a way that others don't easily understand or relate to.

**Overwhelmed, secretly or overtly.** Keeping daily life under control takes much more work than others realize.

**Subordinate to their spouses.** Their partners spend a good deal of time correcting them or running the show. The corrections make them feel incompetent, and often contribute to a parent-child dynamic. Men can describe these interactions as making them feel emasculated.

**Shamed.** They often hide a large amount of shame, sometimes compensating with bluster or retreat.

**Unloved and unwanted.** Consistent reminders from spouses, bosses, and others that they should "change" reinforce that they are unloved as they are.

**Afraid to fail again.** As their relationships worsen, the potential of punishment for failure increases. But ADHD inconsistency means this partner will fail at some point. Anticipating this failure results in reluctance to try.

**Longing to be accepted.** One of the strongest emotional desires of those with ADHD is to be loved as they are, in spite of imperfections.

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## How the non-ADHD partner often feels:

**Unwanted or unloved.** The lack of attention is interpreted as lack of interest rather than distraction. One of the most common dreams is to be “cherished,” and to receive the attention from one’s spouse that this implies.

**Angry and emotionally blocked.** Anger and resentment permeate many interactions with the ADHD spouse. Sometimes this anger is expressed as disconnection. In an effort to control angry interactions, some non-ADHD spouses try to block their feelings by bottling them up inside.

**Incredibly stressed out.** Non-ADHD spouses often carry the vast proportion of the family responsibilities and can never let their guard down. Life could fall apart at any time because of the ADHD spouse’s inconsistency.

**Ignored and offended.** To a non-ADHD spouse, it doesn’t make sense that the ADHD spouse doesn’t act on the non-ADHD partner’s experience and advice more often when it’s “clear” what needs to be done.

**Exhausted and depleted.** The non-ADHD spouse carries too many responsibilities, and no amount of effort seems to fix the relationship.

**Frustrated.** A non-ADHD spouse might feel as if the same issues keep coming back over and over again (a sort of boomerang effect).

*Adapted from **The ADHD Effect on Marriage: Understand and Rebuild Your Relationship in Six Steps**, by Melissa C. Orlov.*

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## Adult ADHD and relationships: Take responsibility for your role

Once you’ve put yourself in your partner’s shoes, it’s time to accept responsibility for your role in the relationship. Progress starts once you become aware of your own contributions to the problems you have as a couple. This goes for the non-ADHD partner as well.

While the ADHD partner’s symptoms may trigger an issue, the symptoms alone aren’t to blame for the relationship problem. The way the non-ADHD partner responds to the bothersome symptom can either open the door for cooperation and compromise or provoke misunderstandings and hurt feelings. If you’re the one with ADD/ADHD, you’re also responsible for the way you react to your partner’s concerns. Your reaction can either make your significant other feel validated and heard or disregarded and ignored.

### Break free of the parent-child dynamic

Many couples feel stuck in an unsatisfying parent-child type of relationship, with the non-ADHD partner in the role of the parent and the partner with ADHD in the role of the child. It often starts when the partner with ADD/ADHD fails to follow through on tasks, such as forgetting to pay the cable bill, leaving clean laundry in a pile on the bed, or leaving the kids stranded after

promising to pick them up. The non-ADHD partner takes on more and more of the household responsibilities. The more lopsided the partnership becomes, the more resentful he or she feels. It becomes harder to appreciate the ADHD spouse's positive qualities and contributions. Of course, the partner with ADD/ADHD senses this. He or she starts to feel like there's no point to even trying and dismisses the non-ADHD spouse as controlling and impossible to please. So what can you do to break this pattern?

#### **Tips for the non-ADHD partner:**

- You can't control your spouse, but you can control your own actions. Put an immediate stop to verbal attacks and nagging. Neither gets results.
- Encourage your partner when he or she makes progress and acknowledge achievements and efforts.
- Stop trying to "parent" your partner. It is destructive to your relationship and demotivating to your spouse.

#### **Tips for the partner with ADHD:**

- Acknowledge the fact that your ADD/ADHD symptoms are interfering with your relationship. It's not just a case of your partner being unreasonable.
- Explore treatment options. As you learn to manage your symptoms and become more reliable, your partner will ease off.
- Find ways to spoil your spouse. If your partner feels cared for by you—even in small ways—he or she will feel less like your parent.

## **Adult ADHD and relationships: Stop fighting and start communicating**

As you've already seen, communication often breaks down between partners when ADD/ADHD is in the mix. One partner feels overburdened. The other feels attacked. They end up fighting each other rather than tackling the issue.

To improve communication, do what you can to defuse emotional volatility. If need be, take time to cool off before discussing an issue. When you have the conversation, listen closely to your partner. Ask yourself what you're really arguing about. What's the deeper issue?

**Example:** A couple fights over dinner being an hour late. The husband, who doesn't have ADHD, is upset over more than his empty stomach. He feels frustrated with his wife's lack of reliability and attention (I work hard to provide for her! Why don't I ever get any TLC? If she cared for me, she'd make more of an effort.). The ADHD wife feels overwhelmed and unfairly judged (I have so much to take care of around the house. It's hard for me to keep on top of everything and I lost track of time. How does that make me a bad wife?).

Once you identify the real issue, it's much easier to resolve the problem. In this example, the husband would be less upset if he realized that his wife's chronic lateness and disorganization isn't personal. It's a symptom of untreated ADD/ADHD. For her part, once the wife understands that a timely dinner makes her husband feel loved and appreciated, she'll be more motivated to make it happen.

### **Communication tips**

- **Don't bottle up your emotions.** Fess up to your feelings, no matter how ugly. Get them out in the open where you can work through them as a couple.
- **You're not a mind reader.** Don't make assumptions about your partner's motivations. Avoid the "if my spouse really loved me..." trap. If your partner does something that upsets you, address it directly rather than silently stewing.
- **Watch what you say and how you say it.** Avoid critical words and questions that put your partner on the defensive ("Why can't you ever do what you said you would?" or "How many times do I have to tell you?").
- **Find the humor in the situation.** Learn to laugh over the inevitable miscommunications and misunderstandings. Laughter relieves tension and brings you closer together.

### **Improving your communication skills when you have ADD/ADHD**

The impulsivity of ADD/ADHD can interfere with communication. The following tips can help you have more satisfying conversations with your partner and other people.

- **Listen actively and don't interrupt.** While the other person is talking, make an effort to maintain eye contact. If you find your mind wandering, mentally repeat their words so you follow the conversation. Make an effort to avoid interrupting.
- **Ask questions.** Instead of launching into whatever is on your mind—or the many things on your mind—ask the other person question. It will let him or her know you're paying attention.
- **Request a repeat.** If your attention wanders, tell the other person so as soon as you realize it and ask him or her to repeat what was just said. If you let the conversation go too long when your mind is elsewhere, it will only get tougher to re-connect.

### **Adult ADHD and relationships: Work together as a team**

Just because one partner has ADD/ADHD doesn't mean you can't have a balanced, mutually fulfilling relationship. The key is to learn to work together as a team. A healthy relationship involves give and take, with both individuals participating fully in the partnership and looking for ways to support each other.

Take some time on both sides to identify what you're good at and which tasks are most challenging for you. If your spouse is strong in an area in which you're weak, perhaps he or she

can take over that responsibility, and vice versa. It should feel like an equal exchange. If you're both weak in a certain area, brainstorm how to get outside help. For example, if neither of you are good with money, you could hire a bookkeeper or research money management apps that make budgeting easier.

### **ADD/ADHD teamwork tips**

- **Divide tasks and stick to them.** The non-ADHD partner may be more suited to handling the bills and doing the errands, while you manage the children and cooking.
- **Schedule weekly sit-downs.** Meet once a week to address issues and assess progress you've made as a couple.
- **Evaluate the division of labor.** Make a list of chores and responsibilities and rebalance the workload if either one of you is shouldering the bulk of the load.
- **Delegate, outsource, and automate.** You and your partner don't have to do everything yourselves. If you have children, assign them chores. You might also consider hiring a cleaning service, signing up for grocery delivery, or setting up automatic bill payments.
- **Split up individual tasks, if necessary.** If the partner with ADD/ADHD has trouble completing tasks, the non-ADHD partner may need to step in as the "closer." Account for this in your arrangement to avoid resentments.

### **Create a practical plan**

If you have ADD/ADHD, you probably aren't very good at organizing or setting up systems. But that doesn't mean you aren't able to follow a plan once it's in place. This is an area where the non-ADHD partner can provide invaluable assistance. He or she can help you set up a system and routine you can rely on to help you stay on top of your responsibilities.

Start by analyzing the most frequent things you fight about, such as chores or chronic lateness. Then think about practical things you can do to solve them. For forgotten chores, it might be a big wall calendar with checkboxes next to each person's daily tasks. For chronic lateness, you might set up a calendar on your smartphone, complete with timers to remind you of upcoming events.

### **Helping your partner with ADD/ADHD**

- **Develop a routine.** Your partner will benefit from the added structure. Schedule in the things you both need to accomplish and consider set times for meals, exercise, and sleep.
- **Set up external reminders.** This can be in the form of a dry erase board, sticky notes, or a to-do list on your phone.
- **Control clutter.** People with ADD/ADHD have a hard time getting and staying organized, but clutter adds to the feeling that their lives are out of control. Help your partner set up a system for dealing with clutter and staying organized.

- **Ask the ADHD partner to repeat requests.** To avoid misunderstandings, have your partner repeat what you have agreed upon.

# Treatment for Adult ADD / ADHD

## A Guide to Finding Treatments That Work



If you are struggling with adult ADD/ADHD there are many safe, effective treatments that can help—and treatment doesn't necessarily mean pills or doctors' offices. Any action you take to manage your symptoms can be considered treatment. And while you may want to seek professional help along the way, ultimately, you are the one in charge. You don't have to wait for a diagnosis or rely on professionals. There's a lot you can do to help yourself—and you can start today.

## Medication is a tool, not a cure for adult ADHD

When you think about treatment for ADD/ADHD, do you immediately jump to Ritalin? Many people equate ADD/ADHD treatment with medication. But it's important to understand that medication for ADD/ADHD doesn't work for everyone, and even when it does work, it won't solve all problems or completely eliminate symptoms.

In fact, while medication for ADD/ADHD often improves attention and concentration, it typically does very little to help symptoms of disorganization, poor time management, forgetfulness, and procrastination—the very issues that cause the most problems for many adults with ADD/ADHD.

## What you need to know about medication for ADD / ADHD

- **Medication for ADD/ADHD is more effective when combined with other treatments.** You will get much more out of your medication if you also take advantage of other treatments that address emotional and behavioral issues and teach you new coping skills.



- **Everyone responds differently to ADD/ADHD medication.** Some people experience dramatic improvement while others experience little to no relief. The side effects also differ from person to person and, for some, they far outweigh the benefits. Because everyone responds differently, finding the right medication and dose takes time.
- **ADD/ADHD medication should always be closely monitored.** Medication treatment for ADD/ADHD involves more than just taking a pill and forgetting about it. You and your doctor will need to monitor side effects, keep tabs on how you're feeling, and adjust the dosage accordingly. When medication for ADD/ADHD is not carefully monitored, it is less effective and more risky.

**If you choose to take medication for ADD/ADHD, that doesn't mean you have to stay on it forever.** Although it isn't safe to bounce off and on any drug repeatedly, you can safely decide to stop treating your ADD/ADHD with medication if things aren't going well. If you want to stop taking medication, be sure to let your doctor know your plans and work with him or her to taper off your medication slowly.

## Regular exercise is a powerful treatment for adult ADHD

Exercising regularly is one of the easiest and most effective ways to reduce the symptoms of ADD/ADHD and improve concentration, motivation, memory, and mood.

Physical activity immediately boosts the brain's dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin levels—all of which affect focus and attention. In this way, exercise and medications for ADD/ADHD such as Ritalin and Adderall work similarly. But unlike ADD/ADHD medication, exercise doesn't require a prescription and it's side effect free.

- **Try to exercise on most days.** You don't have to go to the gym. A 30-minute walk four times a week is enough to provide benefits. Thirty minutes of activity every day is even better.
- **Pick something enjoyable, so you'll stick with it.** Choose activities that play to your physical strengths or that you find challenging yet fun. Team sports can be a good choice because the social element keeps them interesting.
- **Get out into nature.** Studies show that spending time in nature can reduce the symptoms of ADD/ADHD. Double up on the benefits by combining "green time" with exercise. Try hiking, trail running, or walking in a local park or scenic area.

## The importance of sleep in adult ADHD treatment

Many adults with ADD/ADHD have sleep difficulties. The most common problems include:

- **Trouble getting to sleep at night,** often because racing thoughts are keeping you up.
- **Restless sleep.** You may toss and turn throughout the night, tear the covers apart, and wake up at any little noise.

- **Difficulty waking up in the morning.** Waking up is a daily struggle. You may sleep through multiple alarms and feel groggy and irritable for hours after getting up.

Poor quality sleep makes the symptoms of ADD/ADHD worse, so getting on a regular sleep schedule is essential. Improving the quality of your sleep can make a big difference in your attention, focus, and mood.

### Tips for getting better sleep

- Have a set bedtime and stick to it, and get up at the same time each morning, even if you're tired.
- Make sure your bedroom is completely dark and keep electronics out (even the dim light from digital clocks or your cellphone can disrupt sleep).
- Avoid caffeine later in the day, or consider cutting it out entirely.
- Implement a quiet hour or two before bed. Try to turn off all screens (TV, computer, smartphone, etc.) at least an hour before bedtime.
- If your medication is keeping you up at night, talk with your doctor about taking a lower dose or taking it earlier in the day.

## Eating right can help you regulate adult ADHD symptoms

When it comes to diet, managing ADD/ADHD is more a matter of *how* you eat than *what* you eat. Most of the nutritional problems among adults with ADD/ADHD are the result of impulsiveness and poor planning. Your goal is to be mindful of your eating habits. That means planning and shopping for healthy meals, scheduling meal times, preparing food before you're already starving, and keeping healthful, easy snacks on hand so you don't have to run to the vending machine or grab dinner at Burger King.

- **Schedule regular meals or snacks no more than three hours apart.** Many people with ADD/ADHD eat erratically—often going without a meal for hours and then binging on whatever is around. This isn't good for your symptoms of ADD/ADHD or your emotional and physical health.
- **Make sure you're getting enough zinc, iron, and magnesium in your diet.** Consider a daily multivitamin if you're unsure.
- **Try to include a little protein and complex carbohydrates at each meal or snack.** These foods will help you feel more alert while decreasing hyperactivity. They will also give you steady, lasting energy.
- **Add more omega-3 fatty acids to your diet.** A growing number of studies show that omega-3s improve mental focus in people with ADD/ADHD. Omega-3s are found in salmon, tuna, sardines, and some fortified eggs and milk products. Fish oil supplements are an easy way to boost your intake.

## Choosing a fish oil supplement

The two main types of omega-3 fatty acids in fish oil: EPA and DHA. Supplements differ in the ratio of each. Your best bet for relieving the symptoms of ADD/ADHD is a supplement that has at least 2-3 times the amount of EPA to DHA.

## Relaxation techniques: An effective treatment for adult ADHD

Many of the symptoms of ADD/ADHD can be mitigated by relaxation techniques such as meditation and yoga. When practiced consistently, these calming therapies work to increase attention and focus and decrease impulsivity, anxiety, and depression.

### Meditation

Meditation is a form of focused contemplation that relaxes the mind and the body and centers your thoughts. Researchers say that in the long run, meditation increases activity in the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for attention, planning, and impulse control.

In a way, meditation is the opposite of ADD/ADHD. The goal of meditation is to train yourself to focus your attention with the goal of achieving insight. So it's a workout for your attention span that also might help you understand and work out problems.

### Yoga

Yoga and related activities such as tai chi combine the physiological benefits of exercise with the psychological effects of meditation. You learn deep breathing and other relaxation techniques that help you become centered and mentally aware. By holding different postures for extended periods, you can cultivate balance and stillness. When you feel overwhelmed or out of control, you can turn to yoga techniques to refresh you and put you back in mental balance.

## Therapy for adult ADHD can teach you better coping skills

Treatment for ADD/ADHD can also mean seeking outside help. Professionals trained in ADD/ADHD can help you learn new skills to cope with symptoms and change habits that are causing problems.

Some therapies focus on managing stress and anger or controlling impulsive behaviors, while others teach you how to handle time and money better and improve your organizational skills.

### Therapy treatment options for adults with ADD / ADHD

- **Talk therapy.** Adults with ADD/ADHD often struggle with issues stemming from longstanding patterns of underachievement, failure, academic difficulties, job turnover,

and relationship conflict. Individual talk therapy can help you deal with this emotional baggage, including low self-esteem, the feelings of embarrassment and shame you may have experienced as a child and teenager, and resentment at the nagging and criticism you receive from people close to you.

- **Marriage and family therapy.** Marriage and family therapy addresses the problems ADD/ADHD can create in your relationships and family life, such as conflicts over money problems, forgotten commitments, responsibilities in the home, and impulsive decisions. Therapy can help you and your loved ones explore these issues and focus on constructive ways of dealing with them and communicating with each other. Therapy can also improve your relationships by educating your partner and family members about ADD/ADHD.
- **Cognitive-behavioral therapy.** Cognitive-behavioral therapy encourages you to identify and change the negative beliefs and behaviors that are causing problems in your life. Since many individuals with ADD/ADHD are demoralized from years of struggle and unmet expectations, one of the main goals of cognitive-behavioral therapy is to transform this negative outlook into a more hopeful, realistic view. Cognitive-behavioral therapy also focuses on the practical issues that often come with ADD/ADHD, such as disorganization, work performance problems, and poor time management.

## **Coaches and professional organizers for adult ADHD**

In addition to physicians and therapists, there are a number of other professionals who can help you overcome the challenges of adult ADD/ADHD.

### **Behavioral coaching for adult ADD/ADHD**

Coaching is not a traditional form of therapy, but it can be a valuable part of ADD/ADHD treatment. In contrast to traditional therapists who help people work through emotional problems, coaches focus solely on practical solutions to problems in everyday life. Behavioral coaches teach you strategies for organizing your home and work environment, structuring your day, prioritizing tasks, and managing your money. ADD/ADHD coaches may come to your home or talk with you on the phone rather than meet with you in an office; many coach-client relationships are long-distance.

### **Professional organizers for adult ADD/ADHD**

A professional organizer can be very helpful if you have difficulty organizing your belongings or your time. Organizers can help you reduce clutter, develop better organizational systems, and learn to manage your time efficiently. A professional organizer comes to your home or workplace, looks at how you have things organized (or not organized), and then suggests changes. In addition to helping you to organize your paperwork and bill paying, a professional organizer has recommendations for memory and planning tools, filing systems, and more. A

professional organizer also helps with time-management: your tasks, your to-do list, and your calendar.

Reference: <http://www.helpguide.org>