

Self-Help for Adults with ADD/ADHD

Exercise and eat right. Exercise vigorously and regularly (but not within an hour of bedtime)—it helps work off excess energy and aggression in a positive way and soothes and calms the body. Eat a wide variety of healthy foods and limit sugary foods in order to even out mood swings.

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.

Eat small meals throughout day.

Eat fewer carbohydrates, while increasing your protein intake.

Get plenty of sleep. When you're tired, it's even more difficult to focus, manage stress, stay productive, and keep on top of your responsibilities. Support yourself by getting between 7-8 hours of sleep every night.

Avoid caffeine late in the day.

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.

Practice better time management. Set deadlines for everything, even for small tasks. Use timers and alarms to stay on track. Take breaks at regular intervals. Avoid piles of paperwork or procrastination by dealing with each item as it comes in. Prioritize time-sensitive tasks and write down every assignment, message, or important thought.

Create space. 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 day planner. Effective use of a day planner can help you manage time and remember responsibilities.

Use lists. Make use of lists and notes to keep track of regularly scheduled tasks, projects, deadlines, and appointments. Keep all lists and notes inside your daily planner.

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.

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.

Become a clock-watcher. Use a wristwatch, timer, alarm, PDA, or computer—anything that keeps accurate time and is within your sight at all times. When you start a task, say the time out loud or write it down. Allot yourself limited amounts of time for each task.

Create a daily ten-minute routine. Attend to filing documents, processing mail, paying bills, and other mundane tasks for the same amount of time each day, and preferably in the same order. If you follow a regular routine, you can be sure you aren't missing something important. If you have only ten minutes, you'll know when to stop.

Give yourself more time than you think you need. For every thirty minutes of time you think it will take you to get someplace or complete a task, add ten minutes.

Plan to be early and set up reminders. Write down appointments for fifteen minutes earlier than they really are. Set up reminders on your computer or on paper to ensure you leave on time.

Take things one at a time. Break down large projects or tasks into smaller, manageable steps.

Work on your relationships. Schedule activities with friends and keep your engagements. Be vigilant in conversation: listen when others are speaking and try not to speak too quickly. Cultivate relationships with people who are sympathetic and understanding of your struggles with ADD/ADHD.

Divide tasks and stick to them. The partner without ADD/ADHD may be more suited to handling the bills and budget, while you manage the children or daily chores.

Develop a communication code. Have your significant other gently remind you to do something or to listen closely by giving you a nonverbal signal you both agree on.

Take responsibility. ADD/ADHD or not, you are a full half of the partnership, and need to work on the things that are hard on your significant other, including communication.

Create better communication. Often the simplest solutions work best—like using a dry erase board to write notes and regular to-do lists. To avoid misunderstandings, have the repeat things that have been said.

Listen actively and don't interrupt. While someone is talking, make an effort to maintain eye contact. If you find your mind wandering, mentally repeat their words so you follow the conversation. Practice not interrupting.

Ask questions. Instead of launching into whatever is on your mind—or the many things on your mind—ask your friend, spouse, or acquaintance a question. It will let him/her know you're paying attention.

Request a repeat. Don't be afraid to ask the person to repeat himself. If you let the conversation go too long when your mind is elsewhere, it will only get tougher to re-connect.

Create a supportive work environment. Make frequent use of lists, color-coding, reminders, notes-to-self, rituals, and files. If possible, choose work that motivates and interests you. Notice how and when you work best and apply these conditions to your working environment as best you can. It can help to team up with less creative, more organized people—a partnership that can be mutually beneficial.

Set aside daily time for organization. Set aside 10 to 15 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.

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.

Save big ideas for later. All those great concepts that keep popping into your head? Jot them down on paper for later consideration.

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.

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Tips for Adults

Developed in collaboration with the mental health centers of NBHP and FBHP & the Client and Family Advisory Board

Revised 5/1/2012

- 1. Participate fully in your treatment.** Be actively involved in setting your individual goals, treatment plan and attending appointments. Practice the skills and techniques you learn in treatment to address and manage your symptoms. You can be hopeful about managing your symptoms. Research has shown that interventions and lifestyle changes for ADHD are quite effective in reducing symptoms.
- 2. Ask questions.** Ask your mental health provider to explain ADHD, treatment alternatives, and suggestions on how you can take charge of your symptoms.
- 3. Be alert to your symptoms.** Many adults with ADHD have additional emotional difficulties, such as depression, anxiety, difficulties with work or relationships, and low self-esteem as a result of living and coping with ADHD. These difficulties can be treated if they are recognized. Communicate any concerns you may have about these symptoms with your treatment providers so you can get the help you need.
- 4. Create support** through family, friends and peers. Ask them for feedback about how they think you are doing with managing symptoms and how symptoms might affect your relationships. Ask your mental health provider for information about online or peer support options such as Children & Adults with ADHD.
- 5. Care about yourself.** Establish a healthy lifestyle that includes adequate sleep, good nutrition and regular physical activity. A healthy life style will help you regulate your energy level and ability to concentrate. See your Primary Care Provider (PCP) regularly and if you don't have one ask your Care Coordinator/Case Manager for help in obtaining one.
- 6. Remember, alcohol and illegal drugs can worsen symptoms of ADHD.** Adults with ADHD are at risk of abusing drugs and alcohol as a way of self-medicating. Be sure to tell your therapist or prescriber if this is a struggle for you.
- 7. Take ADHD medications as prescribed.** Talk with your prescriber if you have questions about your medication, especially if you are having uncomfortable side effects or trouble remembering to take the medications regularly. They can work with you to come up with solutions to these issues.

8. Create a routine/structure for yourself. Use your phone, planner, or calendar to stay on track with your goals, appointments, etc. Create lists for remembering daily tasks, and use other types of reminders to help you organize your day. There are a number of applications available for smart phones or computers to help manage symptoms of ADHD and get organized.

9. Learn about ADHD and how you can learn strategies for coping effectively with symptoms. Ask for written materials and read information on the Internet or from the library (see the resources list below).

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Tips for Adults

Developed in collaboration with the mental health centers of NBHP and FBHP & the Client and Family Advisory Board

Revised 5/1/2012

Resources for Clients and Families

ADDitude: Living well with attention deficit <http://www.additudemag.com/>

National Institute of Mental Health (1-800-421-4211 or <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/attentiondeficit-hyperactivity-disorder/complete-index.shtml>)

Attention Deficit Disorder Resources <http://www.addresources.org/?q=node/253>

Children and Adults with ADHD (CHADD) www.chadd.org
<https://www.achievesolutions.net/achievesolutions/en//Home.do>

Books:

Taking Charge of Adult ADHD by Russell Barkley, Ph.D.

Journeys Through ADDulthood by Sari Solden

The Gift of Adult ADD by Lara Honos-Webb, Ph.D.

You Mean I'm not Lazy, Stupid, or Crazy?! By Kate Kelly and Peggy Ramundo