

ADHD

IN ADULTS

A GUIDE FOR SUCCESSFULLY
LIVING WITH ADHD



This educational booklet has been developed independently by the ADHD Foundation with financial support from Takeda UK. Takeda UK has also reviewed the content for factual, medical accuracy and compliance with ABPI Code of Practice.





Introduction

Dr Tony Lloyd – C.E.O.

ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity

Dear reader,

This booklet is designed to provide you with essential knowledge and practical strategies to support you in living successfully with ADHD. This booklet will also be helpful for those of you who are considering for the first time that you might have ADHD, would like to learn more about the condition, and are contemplating whether to seek a formal diagnosis.

ADHD can impact on your physical and mental health. Although there is now a lot of ongoing research into this condition in the United Kingdom and a growing amount of information available online, there remain some enduring myths and misconceptions about ADHD. These misconceptions can sometimes prevent people from truly understanding what ADHD is, how it can affect them and how to manage it successfully.

I hope that this booklet will be of use to you in learning all about this endlessly fascinating condition. ADHD can present challenges in our daily lives, but there are also many individuals who testify to strengths and positives that are associated with this condition once we understand it and learn how to manage it. ADHD does not define you, it is a lens through which you experience the world we live in.

This guide invites you to employ an encouraging, supportive and strength-based approach to living with ADHD that enables you to recognise and realise your potential, and find solutions to support you with those aspects of your life that you may struggle with. I hope you enjoy reading this booklet and find it useful!

"ADHD does not define you, it is a lens through which you experience the world we live in."



2	Introduction
6	Self assessment
10	How do I get a diagnosis for ADHD?
15	Understanding how ADHD affects you
20	Common executive functioning challenges for adults with ADHD
22	Five strategies to support executive functioning difficulties
24	Sleep
30	A Healthy Diet



36	Exercise and Fitness
38	Daily Stress Reduction Strategies
42	Relationships
46	Medication
47	CBT
48	Thriving with ADHD – the good news!
50	References

Self Assessment

The first part of this booklet is for those readers who are interested in exploring whether you have ADHD and then how you might go about getting a diagnosis.

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition. The letters stand for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. NHS England estimate that 3% of the population have ADHD. It is characterised by three main features- Inattention, Hyperactivity and Impulsivity. However, many clinicians also recognise that difficulty with emotional regulation and what we call 'executive functioning' skills are common features of ADHD.

What do these features actually mean? Isn't everybody inattentive, hyperactive and impulsive at times? Well, yes we are, and there are physical and mental health conditions that may share similar symptoms. Everyone who is experiencing stress can find it difficult to concentrate, be forgetful, impulsive and 'always on the go'. So what would make these features stand out and be defined as ADHD? Simply, these characteristics present in a more extreme form in those with ADHD and will have done since childhood. ADHD can be a lifespan condition and how it affects us can change as we transition from childhood into adulthood and in later life.



Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale (ASRS) (1)

- Complete Part A and Part B by marking an X in the box.
- Score Part A – if four or more marks appear in the blue boxes then you have traits consistent with ADHD and further investigation is warranted.
- Part B can give further information and add extra context.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
1. How often do you have trouble wrapping up the final details of a project, once the challenging parts have been done?					
2. How often do you have difficulty getting things in order when you have to do a task that requires organisation?					
3. How often do you have problems remembering appointments or obligations?					
4. When you have a task that requires a lot of thought, how often do you avoid or delay getting started?					
5. How often do you fidget or squirm with your hands or feet when you have to sit down for a long time?					
6. How often do you feel overly active and compelled to do things, like you were driven by a motor?					
Part A					
7. How often do you make careless mistakes when you have to work on a boring or difficult project?					
8. How often do you have difficulty keeping your attention when you are doing boring or repetitive work?					
9. How often do you have difficulty concentrating on what people say to you, even when they are speaking to you directly?					
10. How often do you misplace or have difficulty finding things at home or at work?					
11. How often are you distracted by activity or noise around you?					
12. How often do you leave your seat in meetings or other situations in which you are expected to remain seated?					
13. How often do you feel restless or fidgety?					
14. How often do you have difficulty unwinding and relaxing when you have time to yourself?					
15. How often do you find yourself talking too much when you are in social situations?					
16. When you're in a conversation, how often do you find yourself finishing the sentences of the people you are talking to, before they can finish them themselves?					
17. How often do you have difficulty waiting your turn in situations when turn taking is required?					
18. How often do you interrupt others when they are busy?					
Part B					

How did you do? Did you answer mostly “Often” “Very often” or “Always?”

I doubt that anybody would answer “never” to any of those questions. Therefore, the answer as to whether or not you might have ADHD lies in the consistency and regularity with which we experience inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity in our lives and if these features are causing any difficulties in your life currently.

If you still think that you might have ADHD, then why might you explore an assessment?





There are several reasons why an assessment may be useful to you:

- ❖ To explore what you are good at and which parts of your life may be more challenging and to develop strategies to help yourself.
- ❖ To find out whether your current difficulties are caused by ADHD and not by another condition.
- ❖ To find out whether you have ADHD and another condition as well.
- ❖ To explore whether there are treatments for ADHD that may be suitable for you.

HOW DO I GET A DIAGNOSIS FOR ADHD?

The first step is to visit your GP and explain that you would like to be referred for an ADHD assessment. Before you meet with them, it is always wise to be as informed as you can be about ADHD. Be ready to justify the reasons why you think you may have ADHD, perhaps referencing traits in the Self-Report Scale on page 7, explaining the impact it has on your life, and discussing your experience as a child/adolescent.

Your GP will want to rule out any physical causes for your symptoms and may use their own screening tools at this stage. The GP will know who in your local NHS service should receive the referral for you to be screened for ADHD. The GP cannot diagnose you with ADHD, and cannot prescribe medications without the guidance of a mental health specialist trained in ADHD. Some people with ADHD may have other mental health concerns, which will also need to be understood and managed with the help of a mental health specialist.

Before your appointment with the mental health specialist, it would be useful to consider the following:

- Your medical history, including any difficulties, support and treatment you may have had for your physical and mental health. If you have any records of these, take them with you. Don't worry if you don't have any records, the mental health specialist can learn a lot from talking to you and taking your clinical history.
- Your experience at school and in education.
- If you feel comfortable to do this, talk with trusted friends and family members and ask for their perspective. Talk with them about what you have learned about ADHD and ask them what they think. With your permission, the mental health specialist may want to obtain information from them as part of the assessment, so it is useful to raise the subject beforehand.
- ADHD can run in families so find out if there is a family history of ADHD and/or other specific learning differences or mental health problems.

An assessment for ADHD will involve an evaluation of your developmental, mental health and medical history. This will enable the mental health specialist to gain an understanding of the impact ADHD has on your life, and guide their support recommendations.



Your assessor will then determine whether your symptoms match the clinical criteria for an ADHD diagnosis.

The clinical criteria your assessor will most likely refer to are those in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, commonly known as DSM-5 (2). There are eighteen symptoms – nine in a group entitled Inattention and nine in a group called Hyperactive or Impulsive.



Inattention

- 1 Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes at work, for example, overlooks or misses details, work is inaccurate.
- 2 Often has difficulty sustaining attention on tasks, for example, during lectures, conversations or lengthy reading.
- 3 Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly, for example, in the absence of any obvious distraction.
- 4 Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish duties in the workplace, for example, starting something and then losing focus and becoming side tracked.
- 5 Often has difficulty organising tasks and/ or activities, for example, managing sequential tasks, keeping materials/ belongings in order, poor time management or failure to meet deadlines.
- 6 Often avoids or dislikes tasks that require sustained mental effort, for example, preparing reports or completing forms.
- 7 Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities, for example, wallet, purse, phone or glasses.
- 8 Often distracted by extraneous stimuli. In adults, this can include unrelated thoughts.
- 9 Often forgetful in daily activities, for example, returning calls, paying bills or keeping appointments.



Hyperactivity + Impulsivity

- 1 Often fidgets with or taps hands and feet or squirms in seat.
- 2 Often leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected, for example, in the office or in meetings.
- 3 Often feels restless.
- 4 Often unable to engage in activities quietly.
- 5 Often "on the go" or acting as if "driven by a motor." Unable or uncomfortable being still for extended times, for example, in meetings or in restaurants.
- 6 Often talks excessively.
- 7 Often blurts out the answer before the question is completed, for example, cannot wait their turn in conversations.
- 8 Often has difficulty waiting his or her turn, for example, waiting in lines.
- 9 Often interrupts or intrudes on others, for example, intruding into or taking over what others are doing.

If your assessor does determine that you have enough symptoms to merit a diagnosis of ADHD, they may also discuss which subtype of ADHD you have. Within DSM-5, there are currently three presentations:

The Combined type.

This means that you have met the criteria in both the Inattention and Hyperactivity/Impulsivity groups.

Predominantly Inattentive type.

This is applied to people who exhibit mainly attention difficulties or poor impulse control and is the most common presentation in adolescents and adults (3).

Predominantly Hyperactive type.

This means that you have not enough symptoms in the Inattention group to be diagnosed as having the Combined type. The central difficulties are in the Hyperactive and impulsive group.



Once you have your diagnosis, you can begin to explore:



UNDERSTANDING HOW ADHD AFFECTS YOU

Living with ADHD can be a major source of anxiety for many. Daily habitual lifestyle changes to reduce your stressors are an integral part of living successfully with ADHD. Making these lifestyle changes is something you need to do gradually – but start now.

Medication can be helpful to many, but there is more to managing ADHD than simply taking medication. To understand the reason why we need to make lifestyle changes and choices that help us manage impairments related to ADHD, we need to explore how ADHD is affecting you personally.

Every person with ADHD is unique. You are a collection of your genetic makeup, your environmental influences, for example, your upbringing, school life, your family, community and your particular set of experiences. Therefore, the way in which ADHD affects you may be different from another person with ADHD who has had a very different set of experiences or family background to your own.

For some people, ADHD is also thought to be associated with physical problems such as asthma (4) and migraines (5). Some women experience more difficulties with ADHD because of hormonal changes (6). So let's explore some of the challenges we associate with ADHD.

Let's look at a couple of aspects of ADHD in more detail, in particular, Executive Functioning skills.

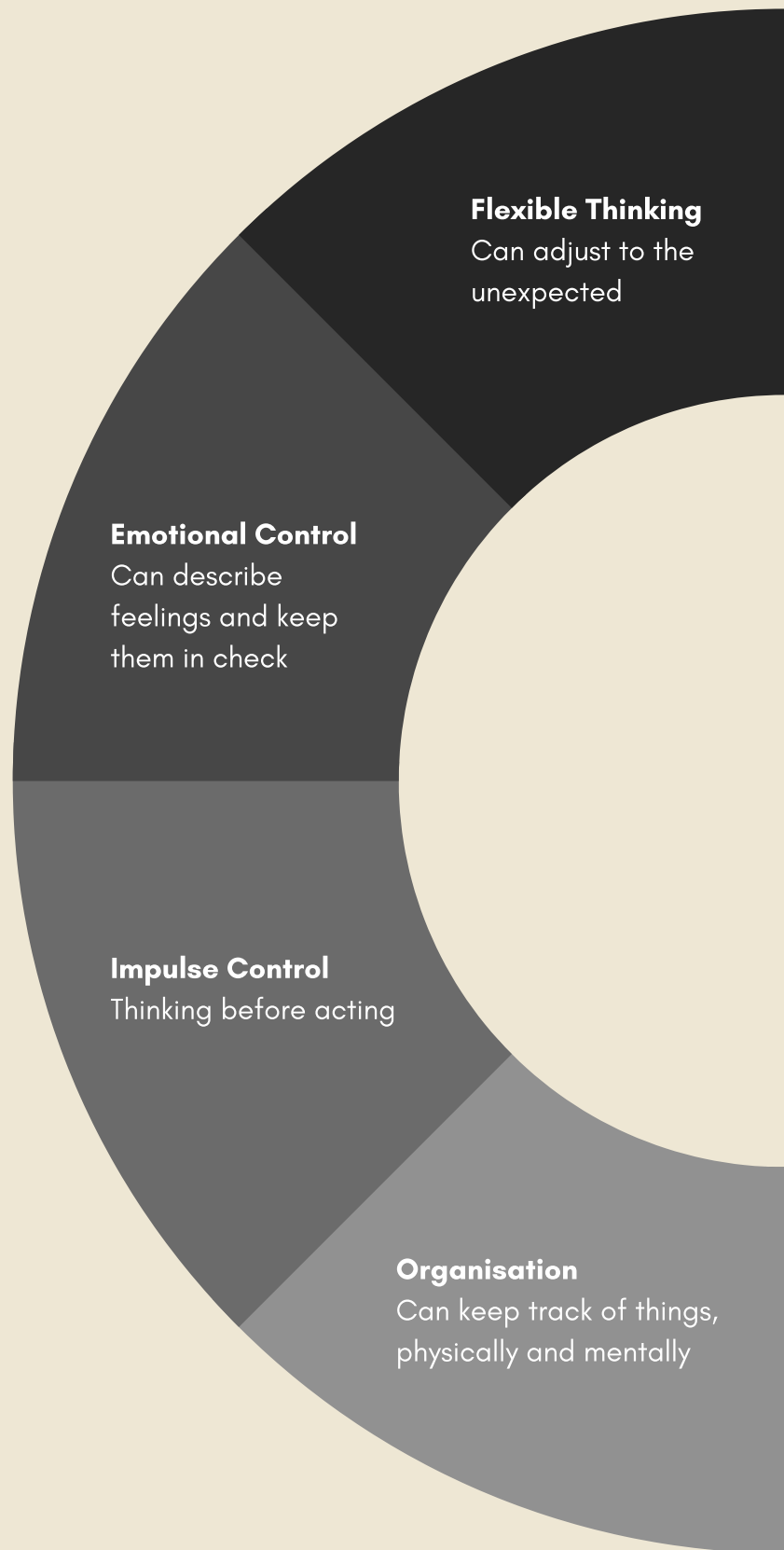
- *Ways to play to your strengths*
- *Supports for your home and at work*
- *Coping skills*
- *ADHD medication*
- *Coaching or therapeutic support*

If you decide not to go for a formal diagnosis or are waiting for one, you can still explore all of the above for yourself, except for the medication option.

Executive functioning

The executive functions are a set of mental skills that everybody has which help us to plan and organise ourselves and use goal directed behaviour to do all of the activities that we need to do in our lives. The executive functions help us to control our attention, impulses and emotions which might prevent us from starting and/ or completing these activities.

We use these skills every day to learn, work and manage daily life. When we have difficulties with our executive functions, this can make it hard to focus, follow directions, and handle our emotions. ADHD can cause difficulties with executive functioning.



Working Memory

Can keep information in mind

Self-Monitoring

Can judge how they are doing

Planning and Prioritising

Can decide upon a goal and can plan to meet it

Task Initiation

Can take action to get started

One of the most important
Executive functions is

Working Memory

Working memory is a system for temporarily storing and managing the information required to carry out complex thinking tasks such as learning, reasoning, and comprehension. Our Working Memory helps us to select and initiate information-processing functions, such as retrieving relevant information from our Long Term Memory that we need to complete the tasks that we have to do in our lives.

There are two types of Working Memory:
Non-Verbal Working Memory and
Verbal Working Memory.

Nonverbal Working Memory develops first in childhood. This enables us to hold information in mind that we see and hear around us. Through this, we learn to imitate others, foresee consequences, develop self-awareness, manage time and delay gratification.

Verbal Working Memory is the ability to talk to yourself. When this begins to develop in children, they learn self-control and how to problem solve. This system helps us to create plans, follow rules, rationalise as well as playing a critical role in moral reasoning.

ADHD can present challenges in both of these areas.



Another central executive function is

Emotional Self-Regulation

Our emotions are very powerful. They can arise within us at any time, whether we want them to or not. Emotions can drive our behaviour. We can experience different and recurring triggers in our lives that cause these powerful feelings of sadness, loss, frustration, anger or joy. There can be many triggers, for example, the perception of being criticised, feeling humiliated, not having our needs met or intense happiness when our expectations of something are exceeded.

Our Verbal and Non-verbal Working memory helps us to regulate these emotions in the following ways:

- We can use our imaginations in order to feel less angry or sad.
- We can self-soothe to reduce the effect of strong emotions.
- We can self-regulate in order to motivate ourselves internally.
- We can distract ourselves from what is triggering our emotions.
- We can reflect on how to express our emotions in socially-acceptable ways.
- We can talk to ourselves about how we are feeling.



When we bring all of the Executive functions together and understand the impact that ADHD can have on them, we can see that there can be many challenges for people.

Which of these are significant for you?





Five strategies to support executive functioning difficulties

Number 1: Externalise what is not happening internally.

This means reduce the amount of information that you are carrying around in your brain. Put key information into a physical form that is accessible to you, for example, in work, carry around a notebook or the Notes facility on your phone and routinely and instantly write down important information or sets of instructions that you have been given. This will become your external Working memory, therefore, always keep it near to you. These notes can then be expanded and become daily goals or the plan for an extended piece of work.

Number 2: Practice external motivation.

Create for yourself regular and frequent types of external motivation, for example, when working on an extended piece of work overtime, break the task down into smaller sections or into blocks of time. Reward yourself on the completion of each section or block of time. This can be as simple as getting yourself a cup of coffee or listening to a piece of music.

Number 3: Externalise Time.

This can be done by making time physical. Timers, watches or reminders on your computer or phone are good examples of this. The more aware you are of time passing through physical reminders, the more help this can be in supporting effective time management.

Number 4: Externalise organisation.

Create visual systems that work for you, for example, planners, calendars, filing systems and daily “To do” lists. Use a highlighter to give visual prominence to key information in documents. Use a daily journal which could also include anticipating specific challenges as well as recording tasks to be done. Remember, there are lots of systems you can use for this, so be ready to change your organisational tools if they are not working for you.

Number 5: Manage your environment.

How distracting is your environment, particularly, your place of work? Is there anything that you can do to change this? This could mean:

- Moving your desk in an office away from a window or away from the area where colleagues congregate and chat.
- Setting blocks on your computer or phone so irrelevant information is not constantly appearing on the screen.
- Put your phone on silent or direct to Voicemail and plan to look at your phone at designated times through the day.
- Consider using noise cancelling headphones or placing screens around your work area.



Another area of your life that
can be affected by ADHD is

SLEEP

It is very common for people with ADHD to have sleep difficulties. Most adults of working age will need between 7-9 hours of sleep each night.

Is that you? Are you getting enough sleep?

Sleep is essential to the maintenance of physical and psychological health. We all know how difficult life can be when we're not sleeping well. Poor sleep can negatively impact on your energy levels, mood, performance and enjoyment of life.

People with ADHD can sometimes find it difficult keeping to a regular night-time routine, be easily distracted and have difficulties switching off in bed. If your mind is still racing with the events of the day or thinking about tomorrow, falling asleep will be more challenging.

ADHD medication, particularly stimulants, can also contribute to this as well as late night consumption of caffeine sources, for example, tea. Coffee, carbonated drinks and chocolate. Mental Health difficulties, for example, Anxiety, Depression or Substance Misuse, combined with ADHD, can also make falling and staying asleep problematic.



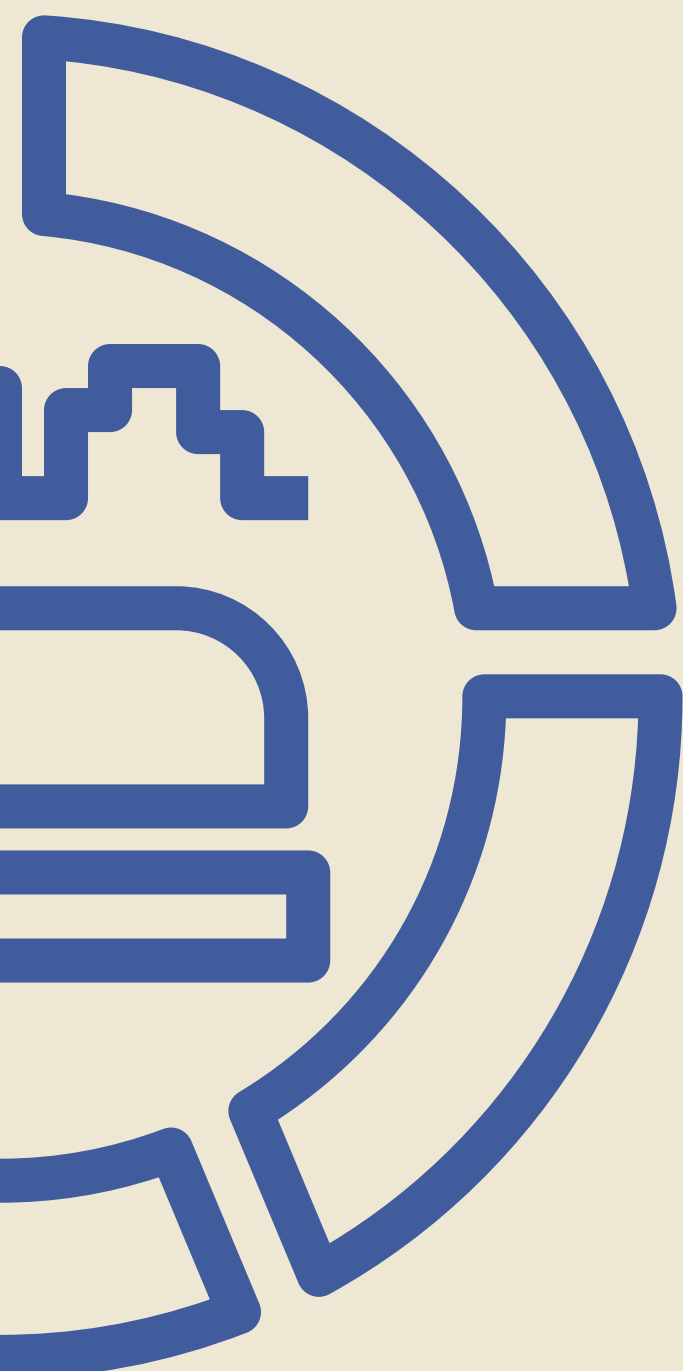
THE SLEEP CYCLE

What happens when we fall asleep?

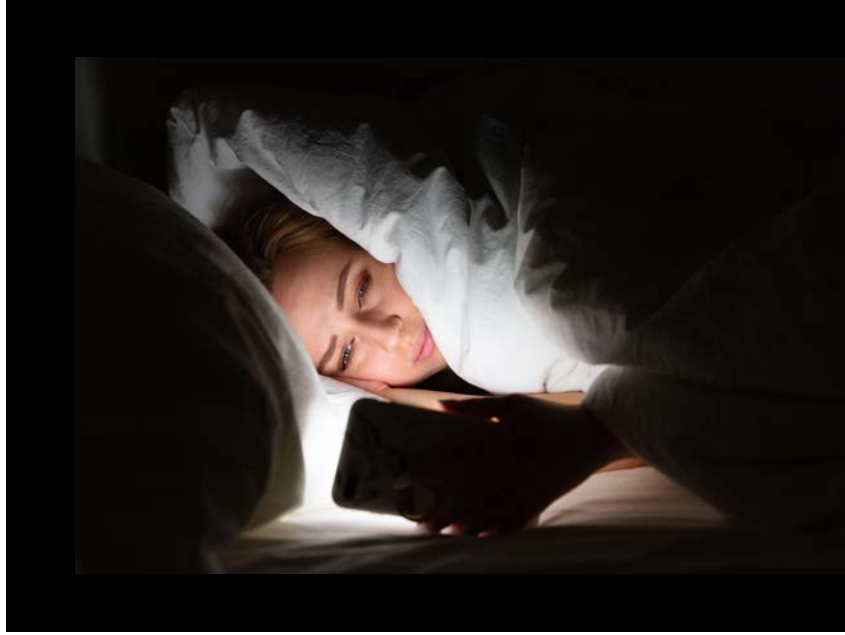
When we fall asleep, three things happen - our body temperature drops, our heart rate slows down and there are changes in brain activity.

When we first fall asleep, we enter into the first non-rapid eye movement (NREM) stage. This is the lighter stage of Sleep and we can be woken out of this quite easily. If we are sleeping successfully, our sleep becomes progressively deeper. We then move through two further stages of NREM sleep until we reach the Rapid eye movement (REM) stage of sleep. This is the stage of the sleep cycle when we start to dream.

Sleeping poorly can lead to lower concentration levels, increased difficulties with working memory and being more prone to procrastination and lack of motivation, particularly in work. For someone who has ADHD, and may already be finding these things problematic, poor sleep has the potential to exacerbate these difficulties.



ADHD AND SLEEP DISORDERS



Some of the more common sleep disorders that may be associated with ADHD include:

Sleep Apnea causes people to stop and start breathing throughout the night. It causes interrupted sleep and feelings of tiredness on waking. Research has concluded that Sleep Apnea is more common in people with ADHD than in the general population (7). Loud snoring can be a sign of Sleep Apnea.

Circadian-rhythm sleep disorders.

Your body works to a cycle each day adjusting to the amount of light and darkness in a 24-hour period. This is called the Circadian rhythm. When it becomes dark, your body releases the hormone, Melatonin. Melatonin signals the body to prepare for sleep.

However, if a person is experiencing a disorder in their Circadian rhythm, their body may not be in tune with the cycle and might not release Melatonin at the right time. This makes falling asleep more difficult. Bright lights in the bedroom, or artificial blue lights from laptops, tablets or phones, can contribute to disruption of the Circadian rhythm.

Restless leg Syndrome (RLS).

Signs of RLS include a strong urge to move the legs whilst in bed and whilst sleeping and persistent limb discomfort. It can also cause people to feel that their legs are itchy or achy or experience pulling or throbbing sensations in their legs. Research into RLS and ADHD has concluded that this can affect up to 44% of people with ADHD (8).

Getting a good night's sleep.

Firstly, if you have had difficulties sleeping for a long time or recognise any of the signs of possible sleep disorders, inform your doctor and your ADHD clinic. If you are using medication for ADHD, it would be useful to have the discussion about how this could be affecting your sleep and explore whether the medication needs to change.

There are also many actions that you can take to help yourself to sleep better. These actions are sometimes referred to as Good Sleep Hygiene.



Four ideas for improving your sleep



1) Develop a bedtime routine.

- A successful bedtime routine relies upon consistency. Going to bed at the same time every evening, including weekends, and getting up each morning at the same time. Try to stick to the routine even if you don't feel tired at those exact times.
- Try relaxation activities in the evenings before bed, for example, taking a bath, reading or listening to audiotapes. The process of taking a bath will raise your body's temperature and then the temperature will lower it when you get out of the bath. This will mirror and complement the physiological process that your body should go through as it winds down to sleep, thus helping this natural process.

2) Take action during the night.

- Instead of lying awake during the night and worrying or ruminating on something, get up and do something relaxing. When you begin to feel tired again, go back to bed.
- Keep a notepad by your bed. Write down what is concerning you. This will help you feel more relaxed if you know that you are not going to forget something for the next day.
- When you first lie in bed, consider meditation or breathing exercises to distract your thoughts and quieten the mind. One popular breathing exercise is called the 4-7-8 technique, created by Dr Andrew Weil (9), Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 7 and then breathe out for 8 and then repeat.
- Plan each night to focus only on positive thoughts when first in bed, for example, three things you were grateful for today. The more positive our thinking, the less stressed we might feel just before sleep.

3) Create a bedroom environment that will support good sleep.

Undertake a bedroom audit: have a look at the space and consider – what are the potential distractions?

- Is the temperature too hot or too cold?
- Is there noise coming from outside and can you reduce this in any way?
- Is the room dark enough?
- Are the lights dim? Black out curtains or blinds can be a good investment.
- Are the walls decorated with muted, darker tones?
- Are your belongings stored away and out of sight?
- Are your bed clothes comfortable or are they contributing to an increase in your body temperature which might impair sound sleep?
- Is your mattress helping or hindering your sleep? A good mattress should be firm enough to support your body effectively. However, a mattress which is too firm will make you feel as if you are perched on top of it as opposed to feeling as if you are laying comfortably.
- How many screens are in the bedroom and can they be removed?

4) Prepare your body for sleep through the day

- Plan for regular exercise. This will help you to feel more tired in the evenings. However, try not to do this too near to bedtime as this may have the opposite effect and you may feel more awake.
- Don't use alcohol to sleep – although alcohol is a sedative, it can have a major negative impact on the quality and quantity of your sleep. Lots of alcohol before bed can make your sleep lighter and more disturbed, meaning you won't feel refreshed the next day (10).
- Avoid caffeine any less than eight hours before bedtime; the stimulant effects of caffeine vary from person to person, but it is important to leave enough time between your last caffeine intake and going to bed so that it doesn't interfere with your ability to get to sleep (10).
- Avoid eating late in the evening and plan for an earlier evening meal.
- Explore specific alternative therapies, such as aromatherapy or massage.
- Plan some time to reflect on the day and think about what you have on tomorrow. 'To Do' lists or journals can be helpful for recording your thoughts and putting them out of your mind before bed.

A Healthy Diet

A healthy diet can not only support good physical health but can also support good mental health and improve sleep.

It is well known that a healthy diet consists of a balance of different food groups, eaten in moderation each day.

Let us consider the recommendations for the different food groups:

The Eatwell Guide, produced for the National Health Service and last reviewed by Public Health England in 2019, recommends that we all eat 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day. Indeed, **fruit and vegetables** should constitute **over a third** of the food we eat every day.

Similarly, **starchy foods** should also make up a **third** of what we eat each day. Therefore, it is recommended that we include starchy carbohydrates, for example, potatoes, bread, rice and pasta, in every meal. Higher fibre versions of these foods are preferable, such as wholegrain varieties or leaving the skins on potatoes. Starchy foods are a good source of energy.

Dairy or dairy alternatives are important sources of protein and calcium, for example, soya drinks, reduced fat cheese or skimmed milk. Ideally go for lower fat and lower sugar products. **Two to three portions per day** will provide you with all the calcium you need. If you are a vegan or lactose intolerant, green leafy vegetables, broccoli and oranges naturally contain calcium as well as calcium-enriched soya milk, rice-drinks or yoghurts.

Good sources of **protein** include fish, eggs or meat. Pulses, lentils or beans are effective alternatives to meat because they are lower in fat and higher in fibre. It is recommended that people eat **two portions of fish per week** (ideally one would be oily fish). If you don't eat fish, nuts and seeds can be good sources of omega-3 fatty acids or consider supplements.

Generally, it is advisable to eat less food that is high in fat, salt and sugar, for example, chocolate, cakes, biscuits, sugary soft drinks and butter.

It is also important to drink plenty of fluids. (**between 6-8 glasses per day**). Healthier options include water, lower-fat milks and lower-sugar or sugar-free drinks, including tea and coffee.

It is recommended that women should consume around 2,000 calories a day and men should have around 2,500 calories a day.

How is your diet and nutrition?

Over the past week, have you: (circle either Yes or No)

- | | |
|--|----------|
| ✓ Eaten five portions of fruit and vegetables each day? | Yes / No |
| ✓ Included starchy carbohydrates in every meal? | Yes / No |
| ✓ Eaten two-three portions of dairy products each day? | Yes / No |
| ✓ Eaten two portions of fish or alternatives each week? | Yes / No |
| ✓ Drank six to eight glasses of water each day?
(low fat milk, sugar free drinks, and tea/coffee are other options) | Yes / No |

If you answered “Yes” to the questions above, well done, you’re doing great! If not, let us consider how ADHD might affect the way we eat and what sorts of food might be beneficial.





Diet, Nutrition and ADHD

Research suggests that ADHD is linked with different eating patterns, exercise levels and sleep behaviours that, along with genetic risk, may be associated with body weight changes not seen in people without ADHD. As a result, many studies have explored the link between ADHD and Obesity. Research published in 2016 drawing together results from a number of studies found that around 28% of adults with ADHD met criteria for obesity, compared to around 16% of people without ADHD (11).

Factors that may link ADHD and eating habits

Impulsive eating without considering food type or calorific intake.

Skipping meals or forgetting to eat, leading to increased feelings of hunger and perhaps overeating as a result.

ADHD medications can suppress the appetite, leading to insufficient nutrition during the day, and overeating as the medication wears off in the evenings or during the night.

Difficulties planning structured times, to buy ingredients and prepare meals. This leads to overconsumption of fast food or high calorie snacks.

Feeling anxious, depressed or bored.

Difficulties following dietary plans, especially if they require extensive research, record keeping, nutritional knowledge and preparation.

Sensory issues can lead to picky eating.

How could ADHD be linked with poor diet?

Problems with inattention and impulsivity are core characteristics of ADHD, and this can have an effect on diet (12). People with ADHD may find themselves overeating, snacking excessively between meals, binge eating or eating late in the evening, because of difficulties with impulse control, lack of awareness of intake, and poor planning. These characteristics are also linked with a preference for foods that are high in carbohydrates or that are satisfying in the short term.



How can you improve your daily food routine?



Plan for several mini-meals through the day can reduce feelings of restlessness which may result in impulsive overeating.



Create a healthy “food environment” in your home, for example by not buying high sugar and high calorie snacks.



Understand that it can take time to see the results of dietary changes. This will help you to stick with any plans and not give up too easily or quickly.



Replace high calorie snacks with a regularly replenished stock of nutritious snacks that require little preparation, for example, hard boiled eggs, yogurt, apples or oranges.



Plan to do a weekly food shop on a set day each week, and plan to follow this with dedicated time to prepare healthy meals which can be frozen and then reheated when needed during the week. Don't shop when you're hungry!

Exercise and Fitness

It is well known and understood that regular exercise helps us in many ways. Regular exercise **strengthens your heart** and **improves your circulation**. Another benefit of regular exercise is increased blood flow and **lower blood pressure**. This raises the oxygen levels in your body and can help to **lower your risk of heart diseases** such as high cholesterol, coronary artery disease, and heart attack. Exercise also **supports good mental health** and **good sleep**.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE FOR PEOPLE WITH ADHD

Improved executive functioning

Helps to keep your body healthy

Reduces feelings of stress and anxiety

Improved impulse control and working memory

Exercise can stimulate the release of neurotransmitters such as dopamine, which plays a role in our ability to focus and concentrate

The National Health Service recommends that adults aged between 19- 64, should engage in some form of physical activity every day. In an average week, it is recommended that adults do at least 150 minutes of moderately intense activity. This can translate to 30 minutes of fitness a day, five days a week. For at least two days per week, this activity should include strengthening activities that work all of the major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, chest, shoulders and arms) (13).

The level and intensity of the activity has to be appropriate to your individual level of fitness. If you have concerns about this, have a disability, are pregnant or a new mother, consult your doctor before embarking upon a new fitness or exercise regime.

FIVE TIPS FOR STARTING AN EXERCISE ROUTINE

Be prepared to experiment to find the type of activity that works for you. If you are not happy with a certain type of exercise, don't give up on exercise completely - move on to another activity.

Get a workout or exercise buddy.

A friend can help you to keep on track.

Schedule it; find the time of day that suits you and remove any obstacles, for example, prepare your workout clothes the evening before or keep your gym bag in the car.

Vary your exercise routine.

That way you won't lose interest or focus halfway through, for example in a gym, consider interval training- alternating short periods of running or cycling with short periods of weight training or alternate between swimming and running on alternate days.

Reward yourself, particularly when starting an exercise programme. Immediate rewards can be critical for completion and perseverance. Choose something you look forward to and don't allow yourself to do it until after exercise, for example, taking a hot bath.

Daily Stress Reduction Strategies

All the challenges mentioned can make life with ADHD stressful. There are some aspects of our life we can control – but there are some responsibilities and challenges we all have to deal with every day. Managing relationships, money, career demands, managing a budget and navigating through unexpected life events can cause so much disruption to our lives, routines and the structures we depend on.

We strongly advise that ‘daily’ – yes, every single day, you commit to spending time to look after your body. Your physical health impacts on your mental health in the same way your mental health impacts on your physical health. We advise that you start off with one of the strategies we will suggest, and build up to use several. Not all will suit you, but you need to be patient and ‘train’ your mind to gradually make these daily habits. After three months, you should start to feel better and notice you are coping better.

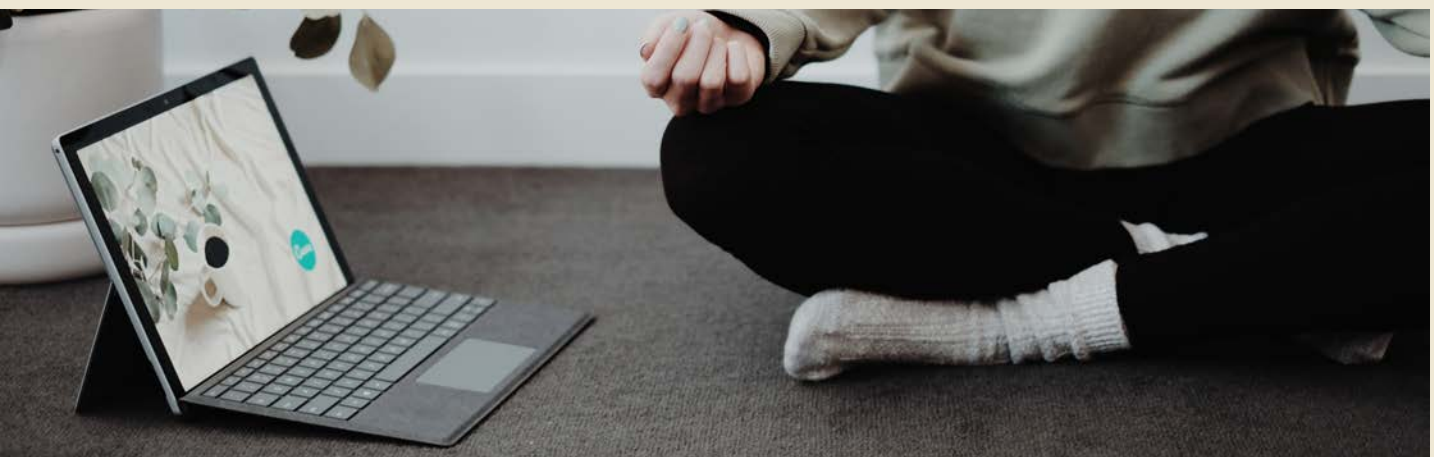
Whatever you choose, make these activities part of your daily and weekly planning routines. You might be pleasantly surprised how much you will benefit. Just be patient with yourself, and over the course of three to six months, make them daily or weekly habits. It will be at least three months before you start to notice benefits so it may be helpful to create some visual reminders around the home – a cork notice board or even a timetable poster to give you a clear visual reminder every day. Setting yourself smart phone reminders at set times in the day will also help you develop these daily habits and lifestyle changes.

By practising the following stress reduction strategies, you may be able to:

Reduce the chances of becoming irritable, impatient or ill tempered

Improve your ability to focus, concentrate, motivate yourself and feel confident you are in control of your own life – whatever is going on around you

Elevate your mood and lift depression



Brisk walking, cycling, swimming or jogging

These kinds of exercise also help to reduce anxiety, lift your mood and improve your motivation.

Yoga

This is a well established stress reduction tool that enables you to 'listen' to what your body is telling you it needs. There are lots of good instructional guides on line and you can practise this for 10 minutes each day.

Hobbies and interests

Hyper-focussing is part of having 'an interest based nervous system'. Many people with ADHD can concentrate for long periods – if they are engaged in something that genuinely interests them. Life however requires us to also pay attention to and act on things that are important to our daily lives and responsibilities.

Having a hobby that enables you to get enjoyment out of something is very relaxing and energising. Whether that is a gentle hobby such as crafts, reading, or a more active hobby such as sport or social group interests, you will benefit from having 'you time' doing something you enjoy that is simply focussed on your well being and enjoyment of life.

Mindfulness meditation

We suggest you spend a few months practicing deep breathing before starting meditation. You do not have to be sat still to meditate; you can practice mindfulness meditation while walking at a slow gentle pace.

Deep breathing

Very slow deep breathing for three to 5 minutes per day, gradually building up to doing this four times each day. You can do this while sat in the office, on public transport, in fact you can do this just about anywhere.

Other strategies

Think about what works for you – what really helps you to unwind and relax? Some people enjoy taking a long bath or going for a massage; some people enjoy reading or listening to talking books; some people enjoy creative endeavours, arts, theatre or simply volunteering – in some way helping others or working on issues they are passionate about such as climate change, care of the elderly, animal welfare, local charities that may have activities you may enjoy as a helper.





Relationships

We all need to feel loved, understood and accepted by the important people in our lives. We know that positive connections and healthy relationships with a range of people is important for maintaining good mental health, having successful intimate relationships, being effective professionally and within your local community.

ADHD can have a significant impact on our relationships. You may well have experienced difficulties with this in the past and have felt that other people haven't understood you or how your brain works. Some people, with a limited understanding of ADHD, can find the condition difficult to be around or to relate to and you may have experienced rejection before.

This may have caused you to feel misunderstood and impatient or disappointed in others. It is a common experience for people with ADHD to feel regularly overwhelmed and exhausted by the daily demands upon them, which can include maintaining and sustaining healthy relationships.

You may have felt that you are constantly apologising to others or that being corrected by others has made you feel incompetent or ashamed. This may result in people withdrawing from certain social situations or not initiating or maintaining relationships from fear that the relationship will ultimately fail.

IMPACTS OF ADHD ON RELATIONSHIPS

Poor memory and organisation

can be perceived as lack of interest, for example, not turning up to a social event or forgetting a birthday or anniversary. A partner may feel aggrieved, for example, doing a disproportionate amount of household planning and organisation.

Putting tasks off until the last minute can increase stress for others, especially in a work environment.

Avoiding tasks that involve multisteps or starting tasks and not finishing can be perceived as **selfishness** by others.

Excessive talk, interrupting others and talking over people can be seen as **lack of interest** in the thoughts and opinions of others.

Difficulties with emotional regulation

can lead to people feeling uncomfortable or wary of being around you.

Impulsivity. Speaking or acting without fully considering the consequences can lead to people feeling insulted and can result in conflict. Impulsive behaviours, such as reckless spending, can impact upon intimate relationships.

12 tips for successful relationships.

- ① Encourage the people in your life to learn more about ADHD.**

Talk to them honestly about how ADHD impacts upon you and the emotions that you experience. Don't bottle up your feelings—explain them fully to those you trust. Encourage those around you to ask questions, this will help them to understand you more.
- ② “Walk around in someone else’s shoes”.**

See things from the other person’s perspective. The first step is to ask and then really listen without interrupting or commenting. When the other person has finished, repeat the main points to them and ask if you have heard them correctly. This will help to show the person that you have listened to them. After that, it is your turn, and the other person will listen to you without interruption or comment.
- ③ Acknowledge the impact that the behaviours associated with your ADHD have on the other person.**

Don't dismiss or ignore the other person's feelings.
- ④ Give back.**

Use reminders to help you to remember to buy gifts, organise social events or to spoil your partner.
- ⑤ Divide household/ childcare tasks up evenly with your partner.**

Plan regular opportunities to review this and break down larger projects into smaller manageable steps. Keep an external record of this for future reference.
- ⑥ Choosing a therapist.**

If you decide to see a counsellor, couple's therapist or occupational therapist in work, ensure that you are seeing someone who understands what ADHD is and how it can impact upon people.
- ⑦ Take responsibility.**

If your partner is doing most of the household organisation or colleagues are doing parts of your job as well as their own, be open about this with them and commit to doing something about it. If your mind has wandered in a conversation, tell the other person and ask them to repeat it.
- ⑧ Explore the available options for ADHD and strategies for self-care, for example, diet, sleep, exercise and medication as detailed in this booklet.**

Keep the other person updated on how you are helping yourself. The more your friends or partner are invested in this, the more likely that their support will encourage you to continue.
- ⑨ Use wall charts, calendars, notebooks or notes on your phone to remind yourself of birthdays**

but also events in your friends and families' lives, for example, birthdays, exams, hospital appointments etc.
- ⑩ Agree rules for when emotions are running high.**

For example, time away from each other to self-calm. Avoid making assumptions. Address issues quickly and don't let them fester and build. Explore issues face to face rather than over the phone or via text or email. Facial expression, vocal tone and eye contact can communicate more than words alone.
- ⑪ Learn to find the humour in situations, particularly where there have been misunderstandings.**

Laughing together can reduce tension and builds bonds between people.
- ⑫ Explore strategies to help with emotional regulation.**

"Understanding how ADHD impacts on my partner has really helped our marriage"

Colin, 55

"Explaining my self-management strategies to friends and colleagues has been very helpful in my social and work life"

Billie, 30

"Having a good routine and better self-awareness has proven to be a winning formula for me"

Josh, 22

"Understanding that my son is not just 'disorganised' has helped me to properly walk in his shoes"

Pauline, 61

"My partner's ADHD diagnosis as an adult became a real positive turning point in our relationship"

Rhianna, 23



Medication

Medication is **proven** to be helpful for many adults with ADHD (14). Medications for ADHD help your brain to function better and improve your ability to focus, remember information, reduce impulsivity, help with emotional regulation and some aspects of executive functioning.

When starting to take medication for ADHD, the prescriber will start a process called '**titration**'. This process involves starting medication on a low dose and over a period of several months, the dose may be increased until it is working effectively for you. This will involve monitoring any change in symptoms, and any potential side effects that might appear. Your prescriber should discuss these with you at the start of titration, or if you change to another medication, so that you are aware of what to look for.

Everyone has a unique brain so comparing yourself to others who have ADHD will not be helpful. Discuss your concerns with your doctor and allow yourself time to get this right.

Medications licensed for ADHD can have effects for different lengths of time. Some are intended to be taken once a day, others a few times a day. It's important that the person taking the medication is aware of how and when to take their particular medication., so you may only need medication for a certain period each day; for most people, this will be when they are at work.

There are two types of ADHD medications: **stimulant** and **non-stimulant** medications. Your prescriber will advise you what might work best for you based on how your ADHD is affecting you and your medical history.

REMEMBER

Medication is **one of a range of strategies** and should be used as such. You must not rely on medication alone to manage ADHD successfully. Medications may cause side-effects like dizziness, drowsiness and visual disturbances and you should be informed of these possible effects and if affected you should avoid potentially hazardous activities such as driving or operating machinery.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Coaching

When looking for a therapist to help you, ensure you check they are appropriately trained, qualified and experienced practitioners who are registered with a professional body. You must also ask them about their knowledge and experience of working successfully with clients who have ADHD.

For some people, simply **having a trusted 'critical friend'** who can give you genuinely honest objective feedback to help you make the changes you want in your life may be enough to support lifestyle changes.

Cognitive behavioural therapy, dialectical behavioural therapy, coaching and group coaching may all be helpful in enabling you to start making the lifestyle choices you need to make, as part of successfully managing ADHD.



Thriving with ADHD – the good news!

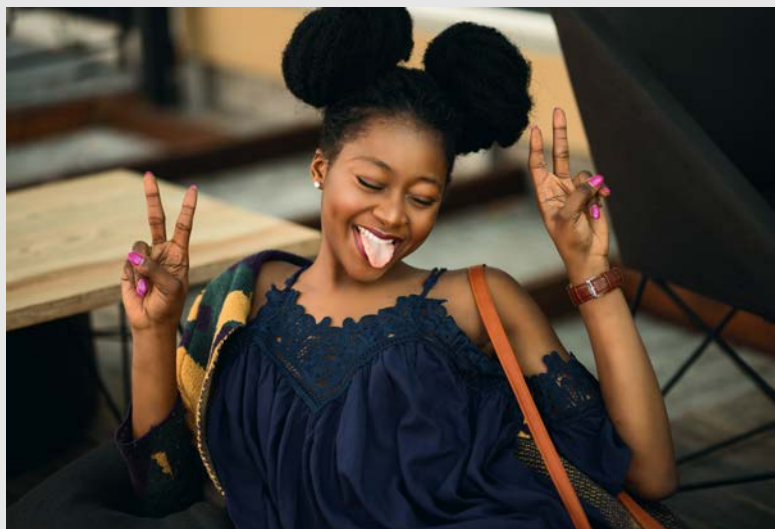
While ADHD can affect us in different ways, once we understand why it is we have been struggling, we can start to explore the many different approaches to managing it and living with ADHD successfully.

For many adults who realise late in life that they have lived with ADHD, it can be both a relief but also a source of sadness as they reflect on how different life might have been if they had known sooner. Criticising yourself or others, blaming others for not knowing why you were struggling will not help. What matters is what YOU do NOW.

This is your opportunity to take control of your ADHD, and learn how to become responsible for managing it so you can get on with the business of living, going to work and pursuing your life goals and interests.

Living with ADHD can be difficult; but the good news is that when we employ these strategies and lifestyle changes, we will start to notice how much better we are feeling, and we will grow in confidence about our ability to manage our day to day lives.

A positive solution focussed attitude is something that we learn – and it takes time. Be patient with yourself, be kind to yourself, cultivate a sense of humour, appreciate the people and things in your life that mean something to you.



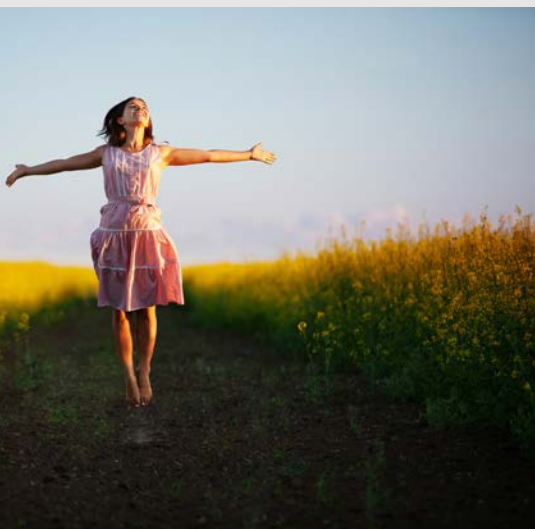
It may help you to explain to those close to you, why you might struggle with some things and what you are trying to do to manage it effectively. Ask for their understanding and support. Remember that support of family and friends will help you as make these adjustments to your life – but the responsibility to manage ADHD is yours. A prescriber can offer medication, but the lifestyle changes are up to you.

These changes will take time to become habits. You will still make mistakes; you will continue to struggle with some things and you will find new ways to help you better manage. When you have learned to manage your ADHD successfully you may begin to realise that there are ways in which your ADHD may help you....

Hyperactivity can be viewed as being energetic, as having drive and enthusiasm. Impulsivity can also be viewed as decisiveness – willing to take a chance, seize an opportunity. Inattention and mind wandering can be viewed as having an imagination that is looking for ideas, inspiration, new experiences and curiosity.

ADHD does not define you; it is an explanation about how your unique mind works. It is an insight into how you interact with the world you live in, and how you interact with and relate to the people who inhabit your world.

Remind yourself that you are doing your best. Celebrate those achievements and the progress you make. Go to www.borntobeadhd.co.uk (initiated and funded by Takeda) and www.adhdfoundation.org.uk for more information!



References

1. R. Kessler et al., *Psychological Medicine*, in press, doi:10.1017/s0033291704002892.
2. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, Arlington, VA, 2013).
3. I. de la Peña, M. Pan, C. Thai, T. Alisso, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Predominantly Inattentive Subtype/Presentation: Research Progress and Translational Studies. *Brain Sciences*. 10, 292 (2020).
4. S. Cortese et al., *The Lancet Psychiatry*, in press, doi:10.1016/s2215-0366(18)30224-4.
5. T. Hansen et al., Comorbidity of migraine with ADHD in adults. *BMC Neurology*. 18 (2018), doi:10.1186/s12883-018-1149-6.
6. S. Young et al., Females with ADHD: An expert consensus statement taking a lifespan approach providing guidance for the identification and treatment of attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder in girls and women. *BMC Psychiatry*. 20 (2020), doi:10.1186/s12888-020-02707-9.
7. Ö. Oğuztürk, M. Ekici, D. Çimen, A. Ekici, E. Senturk, *Journal of Clinical Psychology in Medical Settings*, in press, doi:10.1007/s10880-012-9331-2.
8. S. Cortese et al., *Sleep*, in press, doi:10.1093/sleep/28.8.1007.
9. 5 effective breathing exercises for anxiety. *Medicalnewstoday.com* (2022), (available at <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/breathing-exercises-for-anxiety>).
10. Sleep Hygiene – The Sleep Charity. *The Sleep Charity* (2022), (available at <https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/information-support/adults/sleep-hygiene/>).
11. S. Cortese et al., Association Between ADHD and Obesity: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *American Journal of Psychiatry*. 173, 34–43 (2016).
12. S. Kittel-Schneider et al., Non-mental diseases associated with ADHD across the lifespan: Fidgety Philipp and Pippi Longstocking at risk of multimorbidity?. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* (2021), doi:10.1016/j.neubiorev.2021.10.035.
13. Physical activity guidelines for older adults. *nhs.uk* (2022), (available at <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-older-adults/>).
14. L. Hechtman, Treatment of adults with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*, 389 (2008).





info@adhdfoundation.org.uk

0151 541 9020

54 St. James Street
Liverpool
L1 0AB

This educational booklet has been developed independently by the ADHD Foundation with financial support from Takeda UK. Takeda UK has also reviewed the content for factual, medical accuracy and compliance with ABPI Code of Practice. Job code: C-ANPROM/GB/ADH/0042. Date of preparation: November 2021.

