

# TIPS ON THE MANAGEMENT OF ADULT ADD

by Dr. William D. Morgan



**“Getting Control of ADD”**  
Helpful Tips and Techniques

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## **About the Author**

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## **Introduction**

What follows is a compilation of information and techniques that I commonly share with my adult ADD clients. ADD in children and adults has been a special interest of mine for more than ten years. I have found that certain information and strategies have been particularly useful to a wide number of the adults with ADD that I see. Some of the information and ideas in this booklet were gleaned from other professionals. Where I could identify the source, I endeavored to give credit.

This booklet is intended to be a quick start or help in developing coping strategies to gain better control of ADD symptoms and related problems. More complete books are listed in the following pages. The reader is encouraged to obtain some of them to further your understanding and management of ADD.

## About ADD in Adults

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is the term used for a neurological condition marked by difficulties with attention and concentration and usually difficulties with self-control and overactivity or restlessness. It is also known as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) because many individuals with ADD are or were overactive and impulsive. About 2-3% of all adults have ADD.

ADD is recognized by mental health professionals as one of the most common disorders of childhood, and was previously thought to resolve in adolescence. Over the past decade there has been a growing awareness that for many if not most individuals with ADD it persists into adulthood. Effective treatment for adult ADD is a relatively new area of study.

ADD affects many aspects of adult life. It affects academic and vocational success, personal and family relationships, emotions and self-esteem. ADD individuals often share a number of positive qualities such as creativity, spontaneity, inventiveness, and sensitivity to others. But it also leads to disorganization, procrastination, difficulty with task completion, and feeling overwhelmed.

## About ADD

### The Nature of ADD

ADD is commonly described as a disorder consisting of chronic difficulties in the areas of attention/concentration, impulsivity, and overactivity. In addition to these “core” symptoms, other symptoms and problems include distractibility, forgetfulness, lack of persistence with tasks, frequent boredom, failure to delay speech or action when appropriate, fidgetiness, restlessness, being “always on the go,” disorganization, difficulty coping with stressful situations, temper outbursts, and frequently changing moods. Not every ADD individual displays all these symptoms. Some ADD individuals have mainly the attentional difficulties and do not have the overactivity and impulsivity. These symptoms frequently lead to low self-esteem, problems with planning and executing tasks, a disorganized lifestyle, poor problem-solving skills, frequent job or relationship changes, social and relationship difficulties, a chronic pattern of underachievement, and/or inconsistency in work production and performance. Many individuals with ADD may have a coexisting problem such as anxiety or depression, a learning disability, or drug/alcohol abuse. It may be that they focus on and seek help for this problem, not recognizing its link to ADD.

## **About ADD**

### **Causes**

ADD is widely recognized among experts as having a biological, neurological basis. It is currently understood as the result of a part or parts of the brain not regulating self-control of attention, impulses, and activity level as it should, likely due in part to a lack of certain neurochemicals. While it is usually an inherited condition, it may be exacerbated by environmental and other factors such as parenting, adversity, or educational environment.

## **About ADD**

### **Progression**

ADD individuals are generally born with ADD. It usually becomes manifest in early childhood. Often it becomes more apparent during elementary school years because of the demands of school experience. For some individuals it may not become apparent until later in life. During adolescence changes in the ADD manifestation often occur. It may be less outwardly obvious, especially when hyperactivity diminishes. For some individuals, it seems to end. For the majority, it usually continues to impact in many ways throughout adulthood, although greater control may be achieved in various ways.

## **About ADD**

### **Diagnosis**

ADD is widespread in our society. It is estimated to affect about 5% of children. It seems males are much more likely to be diagnosed with ADD than females. There is no definitive test for ADD, and it is one of the most difficult diagnoses to assess. ADD can only be diagnosed by a mental health or medical clinician trained and experienced in the area of ADD. Comprehensive interviews covering childhood and adult history of academics, relationships, behavior, etc. are necessary to establish a diagnosis. Rating scales and certain tests are often helpful and employed. Because the main symptoms of ADD overlap with other conditions as well as with “normal” experience, a qualified professional is required to rule out other conditions that may produce symptoms resembling ADD. ADD should not be self-diagnosed. If you think you have ADD it is recommended that you consult a professional.

## About ADD

### Treatment

ADD is not an all or nothing condition, but occurs in degrees. It is possible to have a mild case that can be relatively easy to manage. Some people have severe symptoms and problems that can impair their functioning greatly. Even severe ADD can, with effort, medication, and support, be managed effectively.

People with moderate to severe problems related to ADD should consider treatment with a professional with training and experience in ADD. Medications can be helpful. Counseling is often indicated to deal not only with the symptoms, but also the resulting issues related to emotions, self-esteem, relationships, work performance, school performance, etc. Greater effectiveness and reaching of potential can be had. There is much that can be done to help the individual struggling with ADD.

Learning new ways to gain control of ADD-related problems is an important part of coping with ADD. A first step is to gain insight and understanding of how ADD impacts in your life. This understanding can then be used to identify the challenges and eventually to develop new strategies and skills for dealing with your ADD symptoms and problems. A counselor or therapist specializing in the treatment of ADD can be very helpful in this process.

## About ADD

### To Learn More About ADD:

Knowledge about ADD and how to cope with and manage it is extremely helpful. To learn more about ADD, obtain one or more of the following books:

**Driven to Distraction** by Hallowell and Ratey, 1994

**Adult ADD** by Whiteman and Novontni, 1995

**Out of the Fog: Treatment Options and Coping Strategies for Adult Attention Deficit Disorder** by  
Murphy and Levert, 1995

**You Mean I'm Not Lazy, Stupid, or Crazy?!** by  
Kelly and Ramundo, 1993

**Attention Deficit Disorder in Adults** by Weiss, 1992

You can also learn about ADD by consulting a professional who specializes in ADD, attending a seminar or workshop, and participating in an ADD support or therapy group.

# Getting Control of Your ADD

Finding out you have ADD can be the beginning of tremendous improvement in your life. Most people with ADD feel dissatisfied with their life in some ways. Perhaps you feel stuck, discouraged, and chronically frustrated. Perhaps you have internalized critical messages from others beginning in childhood and believed that you were lazy, stupid, incompetent, etc. But now you know that the problems you experienced were due to a subtle neurological deficit that you had little control over.

Now things can change for the better. Having ADD does not disqualify you from being “successful.” You can make significant improvement—with hard work, support, and proper treatment.

**The following ideas have helped many adults with ADD:**

- Learn as much about ADD as you can
- Become involved in counseling for ADD issues
- If your ADD is moderate to severe, a trial of medication may yield good results
- Discover and implement behavioral strategies to compensate for ADD characteristics
- Find support in a group, therapist, friend, etc.

With hard work, support, and treatment, you can gain much better control of your ADD.

## Getting Control of Your ADD

# Commitment

Make a commitment to do the best you can to remedy the difficulties that result from your having ADD. You do not need to be perfect—just do your best!

Whether or not you obtain counseling or join a support group, the only person who can get control of your ADD is you. You will need to make a commitment to this process. Complete and sign the following commitment pledge.

I commit to do my best to help myself.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

What can you do if you fall off the ADD track?  
It's very simple. Get back on track.

I commit to get back on track if I fall off.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Credit: Dr. Lynn Weiss

## **Getting Control of Your ADD**

# **Common Consequences of Having ADD**

### **“Most frequent presenting complaints of adults being evaluated for ADD”**

Study done at University of Massachusetts  
ADHD Clinic, Kane et al, 1990

1. Difficulty in finding and keeping jobs.
2. Performance on job below level of competence.
3. Inability to perform up to intellectual level in school.
4. Inability to concentrate.
5. Lack of organization.
6. Inability to establish and maintain a routine.
7. Poor self-discipline.
8. Depression, low self-esteem.
9. Forgetfulness or poor memory.
10. Confusion, trouble thinking clearly.

## Getting Control of Your ADD

# ADD Challenges

Success in school or the workplace depends on certain skills that many with ADD lack.

- Staying organized
- Planning
- Paying attention to uninteresting information
- Completing tasks not of own choosing
- Meeting deadlines
- Remaining in the same place for long periods
- Making good choices
- Working independently
- Keeping track of possessions
- Arriving on time
- Listening to and following directions
- Controlling emotions
- Dealing with frustration

## Getting Control of Your ADD

# 29 Positive Aspects of ADD

- Sensitive
- Empathic with feelings of others
- Feels things deeply
- Creative in nature (incl: in problem solving)
- Inventive
- Often sees things from a unique perspective
- Great at finding things that are lost (incl: money on the group or people in a crowd)
- Perceptually acute
- Stand-up comic
- Spontaneous
- Fun
- Energetic
- Open and unsecretive
- Eager for acceptance and willing to work for it
- Responsive to positive reinforcement
- Doesn't harbor resentment
- More likely to do things because they want to than because they should, thus wholehearted in efforts
- Difficult to fool
- Looks past surface appearance to the core of people, situations, and issues
- Down to earth
- Good networker
- Sees unique relationships between people and things
- Cross disciplinary and interdisciplinary
- Less likely to get in a rut or go stale
- Original, with a sense of humor
- Observant
- Loyal
- Intense when interested in something
- Quick if they like what they are doing

—compiled by Dr. Lynn Weiss

## Getting Control of Your ADD

# ADD Self Assessment

Problems/Needs Checklist: Check the items that you feel you need improvement in:

- Understanding and knowledge about Adult ADD
- Difficulty with organizing self, work, life  
(scheduling, prioritizing, task completion, work space, getting things done, belonging, finances, etc.)
- Difficulty with planning
- Difficulty getting things done, completing tasks
- Managing emotions—temper, depression, overreacting, etc.
- Managing impulsivity (acting without thinking), impatience
- Self-esteem
- Dealing with distractions
- Getting instructions right, following directions
- Being a better listener
- Keeping track if things (forgetful, loses things)
- Studying
- Career choice
- Concentration, paying attention, focusing
- Relationship difficulties
- Substance abuse
- Overactivity, restlessness
- Other:

**Now rank the 5 biggest needs:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**Which issue, when dealt with, will make the biggest difference in your life?**

**Getting Control of Your ADD**

## **Proven Treatments for Adults with ADHD**

1. Education—learn about ADD
2. Compensatory behavioral strategies
3. Counseling—psychotherapy,  
vocational, marital, etc.
4. Medication

Keep reading . . .

# **Top 10 Strategies**

## **for Inattention, Impulsivity, Restlessness**

### **1. Increase structure.**

Develop external controls to compensate for unreliable internal controls. Examples: organize, establish routines, develop specific goals and step-by-step plans. Utilize lists, schedules, simple systems. Prioritize tasks and things to do. Break down large projects into parts and develop a step-by-step plan.

### **2. Exercise.**

Exercise reduces restlessness, clears the mind, improves concentration, has a calming effect, and improves mood. Take a brisk walk for 5-10 minutes periodically during the day. Exercise for longer periods (30 minutes or so) every day or every other day.

## **Top Ten Strategies**

### **3. Take frequent breaks.**

Work within your attention span. Concentrate on a task for 20-30 minutes and allow a short break to refresh and replenish. Walk around during your break.

### **4. Variety, novelty.**

Variety and novelty help rejuvenate and sustain interest, motivation, persistence. Try to develop more variety and novelty in your life and work.

## **Top Ten Strategies**

### **5. Planned task-shifting.**

Ordinarily, shifting tasks before completion of a task is a problem for individuals with ADD because tasks don't get done. However, within a reasonable framework, you can make this natural tendency work for you. Set yourself up with 2-3 tasks and alternate between them after intervals of about a half-hour. Changing tasks can rejuvenate your concentration, etc. Example: alternate between paperwork (½ hour) and errands (½ hour). Or when you have a lot of reading, alternate between two books.

### **6. Modify your work environment.**

Do what you can to minimize distractions. Find a quieter place to work. Try changing locations periodically. Reduce clutter.

## **Top Ten Strategies**

### **7. Do concentration-intensive work at peak hours.**

Determine what time of day (i.e. morning, afternoon, evening, etc.) your ability to concentrate is strongest. Plan to do work that requires concentration during this time of day, and schedule work that requires less concentration during periods of the day when your ability to concentrate is not as good.

### **8. Anti-impulsivity self-statements.**

Develop catchy phrases to say to yourself to help you refrain from impulsive action. Repeat them to yourself vigorously in key situations. Examples: “be careful”, “don’t rush this”, “take your time”, “slow down”, “don’t make a hasty decision”, “take a step back, think, and then decide”, “think before you act.”

## **Top Ten Strategies**

### **9. Don't rush into decisions.**

Put important decisions “on the back burner” for a while, for further reflection. Example: instead of buying something expensive on impulse, get yourself to delay for awhile and walk around the mall some more. You can come back and buy it if it still seems like a good idea.

### **10. “Stop, think, make a plan.”**

In key situations, catch yourself, slow down, think (“what will happen if I . . .”) before acting. Inhibit “knee-jerk” reactions. Train yourself to think before you act, using these three steps: 1. Stop—catch yourself; 2. think—about possible actions and about potential consequences; 3. make a plan to deal with the situation.

# **Structuring**

## **Getting Control of Your ADD**

### **Introduction:**

Structure is a set of external controls that one sets up to compensate for unreliable internal controls. Most people with ADD cannot depend on their internal controls to keep things organized and keep themselves on task. A reliable system of external controls is essential. It can be a creative and personal structure. When it is in place it is calming, confidence building, and helps performance.

### **Structuring involves the following components:**

#### **1. Organizing**

Improved organization leads to improved control and effectiveness. Organization applies to your environment (home, office, belongings, workspace, etc.) and using tools such as a schedule, lists, filing system, calendar, bulletin board, etc.

## **Structuring**

### **2. Patterning**

Patterning refers to the development of routines and habits so that important tasks and obligations are carried out without forgetting. You can plan certain regular appointments or tasks into the pattern of your week so that you do them automatically. List all your regular tasks, obligations, and appointments and plug them into a regular time slot. Soon it will become a habit, and you won't forget.

### **3. Goals**

Having clear, specific goals and reflecting on them regularly gives you direction and helps you to stay on the right track and motivated, increasing your effectiveness and productivity. List your goals, reflect on them regularly, and evaluate your progress periodically. Make sure you are on course and make adjustments when needed. "If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time."

## **Structuring**

### **4. Planning**

Yearly, monthly, weekly, and daily planning helps you figure out the steps to take toward your goals and what to do next. Both long-range and short-range planning is important. Applying means-end thinking to your goals will aid you in effectiveness in accomplishing them. Having a clear, specific, step-by-step plan creates the structure you need.

### **5. Coaching**

A “coach” can help you think things through, prepare for obligations, develop plans and strategies, and will provide encouragement and accountability. Daily or weekly “check-in’s” are very helpful for many. Find someone who can serve as your “coach.”

## Structuring

### **Many tools and methods are valuable in helping you to develop increased structure in your life:**

- Lists—such as daily, weekly, monthly “to do” lists
- A weekly/daily schedule
- A calendar
- A basic filing system
- Writing down important items
- Prioritizing tasks and things to do
- Breaking down large projects into small chunks or steps
- Reflect on your goals regularly and track your progress
- Scan your calendar or schedule daily and revise as necessary
- Post reminder notes in a visible location such as a bulletin board, mirror, refrigerator, etc.
- Organize your workspace
- Roladexes, bulletin boards, “in-out” boxes, a computer system, alarm watches, etc., etc.

## Structuring

### Structuring Tips:

- Get help with getting and staying organized.
- Take 15 minutes of beginning of each day for planning the day.
- Plan your day and follow your plan.
- Break large tasks into chunks. Establish a time-schedule for each.
- Keep your schedule with you and refer to it. When you take on a new task, put it in the schedule.
- Don't be overly "reactive." Don't abandon plans and priorities easily when other things come up.
- Categorize tasks as A-B-C priority.
- Give yourself deadlines.
- Build rewards in for yourself.
- Write things down that you think of so it won't distract you.
- Do it now. Have an "automatic attack attitude." Don't allow procrastination.

## **Structuring**

# **How to Get Something Done**

## **Agenda for Completing a Project**

1. Establish specific goals for the project and revise as needed.
2. Set realistic dates for completion of work.
3. Reward yourself for progress.
4. Make specific goals for each work session.
5. Schedule sufficient blocks of time for working on the project.
6. Plan an efficient way to use your time during each work session.
7. Postpone socializing or doing other things during each work session.
8. Ask for help when stuck.
9. Recall past accomplishments to help in doing the current project.
10. Let go of perfectionistic standards.

## Structuring

# Time Management

Good Time management involves planning, prioritizing, remembering and reviewing the plan that has been developed, making midcourse corrections, and sticking to the plan.

**The Schedule and Calendar:** Learning to make use of a daily/weekly schedule in which you can write all appointments, obligations, and tasks to accomplish is an important part of time management. In addition, a yearly calendar is also helpful for marking important events.

# **Dealing with INATTENTION**

One of the most frequent complaints of adults with ADD is that they lack the abilities to focus and sustain their attention. Along with this, adults with ADD tend to be very distractible, and often get sidetracked from completing important tasks. These attentional difficulties lead to problems such as forgetfulness, poor task completion, and difficulty listening and reading. In addition, adults with ADD become easily bored with tasks or activities that are not highly stimulating or interesting, making follow-through or avoidance a problem.

## Dealing with Inattention

# Mastering Distractions

1. Select the least distracting work environment, perhaps a quiet location away from distractions.
2. Sound screens to cover up distracting noises are used by many ADD adults. Such a sound screen may be a device such as that often used in therapist's offices which makes a continual swooshing sound, providing "white noise" which blocks out other sounds. A fan can do the same thing. Or, a radio playing in the background may help.
3. Many ADD adults are distracted by their own thoughts, so having a note pad handy to write down distracting ideas can help.
4. Work in an uncluttered area. Clear off your desk or table to remove distractions.

## **Dealing with Inattention**

# **Self-Monitoring and Redirecting**

1. Observe yourself as you are working, and when you catch yourself drifting off task, redirect yourself back to the work at hand. Ask yourself “What should I be doing now?” frequently.
2. Use your “self-talk” to encourage and motivate yourself to concentrate and stay on task. Devise self-statements such as “keep concentrating”, “try to concentrate on this and get it done”, “you can take a break soon”, “keep pushing”, etc.

## **Dealing with Inattention**

# **Accommodating Your Short Attention Span**

- 1.** Break up your work into manageable parts that can be accomplished in time periods within your ability to concentrate. Pace your work to fit your attention span.
- 2.** Schedule concentration-intensive work during your “peak” hours of concentration. For example, some people find that they concentrate better during the morning hours. What are your best hours of the day for concentrating?

## **Dealing with Inattention**

# **Increasing Attention Span**

- 1.** Exercise is often helpful in a couple of ways. Exercise breaks in the workday often help increase attention and concentration. Also, beginning the day with exercise helps many with their attention.
- 2.** Taking frequent breaks and moving around can rejuvenate your ability to concentrate. Periodic physical activity reduces restlessness. Take a walk every now and then.

## **Dealing with Inattention**

# **Listening and Reading Better**

Listening and reading are two common areas of attentional difficulty for ADD individuals. “Active listening” is a technique that aids listening to others in conversations. To use this technique, periodically paraphrase and state back to the other person the content of what he or she is saying.

Similarly, you can turn reading into a more active process by looking for specific information as you read. This is accomplished by overviewing the material and making up questions to answer from the material as you read. Reading with a pen in hand and underlining or jotting notes as you read also aids in focusing and maintaining attention.

Learning can be made into a more active process by repeating the material to be learned or read, restating it in your own words. By making listening, reading, and learning a more active process, your attention and concentration will improve.

## **Dealing with Inattention**

# **Use Rewards**

Build incentives for concentration into your work. Schedule small rewards for yourself that are to be earned by periods of concentrated work or study.

# Dealing with IMPULSIVITY

**Impulsivity causes ADD adults to:**

- Say things they later regret
- Make poor decisions
- Risk injury to themselves, others, or property.
- Rush and do poor quality work

When we are not being impulsive, we reflect and think things through. We consider the consequences of our statements and actions, and decide to do what is best based on what will likely result.

## Dealing with Impulsivity

For Impulsivity...STOP-THINK-MAKE A PLAN

# The Five Problem Solving Steps

1. What is the problem?
2. What are some possible solutions?
3. What is the best solution?
4. Try the solution.
5. Did the solution work?

Finding a good solution to problem situations begins with recognizing when a problem exists—picking up on the signals around you (facial expressions, tone of voice, your own tension or feelings, etc.).

Then, brainstorm possible solutions. Think about the alternatives that you have.

Next, evaluate each alternative in terms of the likely consequences it will generate—for yourself and others. Choose the option that will have the best outcome.

Then, try the solution, and evaluate the results. Did it work? If yes, great! If no, try a new strategy, a back up plan.

Credit: Braswell and Bloomquist

## Dealing with Impulsivity

# Using Self-Talk

Devise some “anti-impulsivity” self-statements to help you to engage in thoughtful reflection about actions, choices, etc., and keep yourself from rushing into decision:

### Examples:

“Be careful.”

“Don’t rush this.”

“Take your time.”

“A hasty decision will lead to trouble!”

“Take a step back, think, and then decide.”

“You don’t have to decide now. Think about it for a while.”

“What will happen if ...?”

“Think before you act.”

“Look before you leap.”

## Dealing with Impulsivity

# Costs and Benefits

Very simply, better decisions are often arrived at by careful consideration of the consequences. A simple process involves listing the pros and cons, and weighing them to decide the merits of a decision.

To do this, take a sheet of paper and draw a line down the middle. At the top, write “Pros” on the left and “Cons” on the right side. Then list the appropriate considerations—the advantages and disadvantages. Weigh them thoughtfully, and decide which outweighs the other—the pros or the cons.

This process is sure to improve the quality of your choices!

Pros	Cons
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

## **Dealing with Impulsivity**

# **Helpful Hints**

- Remember that you are often not obligated to respond to someone's question or request immediately. Buy yourself some time by telling the person you'll get back to them. Learn to say "No", or "I need some time."
- Identify your greatest temptations, and decide now not to act on impulse in the future. Make a commitment to yourself to delay your decisions in these situations, to give yourself time to reflect before deciding.

# Dealing with **OVERACTIVITY**

The energy, vitality, and vigor that come with ADD can be positive. But often ADD adults have too much restlessness and too high an activity level.

Some or all of the following traits are common among adults with ADD:

- Restlessness
- Fidgetiness and squirming when seated or inactive for a long time
- Feeling a pressure to be active, always on the go
- Feeling in a rush, or anxious to move on to the next activity
- Excessive talking
- Difficulty relaxing
- Difficulty remaining seated for long periods of time

## Dealing with Overactivity

# Relaxation Techniques

Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique used to control tension and stress and create a greater awareness of tension and relaxed states in the body. Regular 20 minute sessions of progressive muscle relaxation have been found to be an effective way to cope with stress, and with practice you will be able to help your body to relax even under pressure.

Get as comfortable as you can in a chair or bed that will support your entire body. Go through the muscle groups listed below in order, and with your eyes closed, tense the group of muscles for 5-10 seconds (be careful not to strain your body). Pay attention to the sensations of tension in that muscle group and then relax (let your body go limp) for 10-20 seconds, noticing the difference in sensations that occur with relaxation. Then go on to the next muscle group. After you have gone through all the muscle groups, continue to relax for as long as you like.

### **Muscle groups:**

1. arms, hands, biceps
2. face and neck
3. chest and shoulders
4. back and abdomen
5. legs, calves, feet

Relaxation is a skill that takes practice. The more regularly you do it, the more proficient you will become. Try this exercise daily for 2-4 weeks, and you may find you have trained your body to relax without tensing muscles.

## **Dealing with Overactivity**

# **Exercise and ADD**

Exercise can help many people to cope with ADD. Regular exercise has been linked to a reduction of symptoms. Although no scientific studies have been done to determine this link, much anecdotal evidence suggests that brain chemicals known as endorphins are released during exercise to help to improve attention and concentration.

Exercise also burns off excess energy, reducing restlessness and fidgetiness. In addition, exercise improves self-esteem and can elevate a person's mood.

So, to gain better attention and concentration, reduce restlessness and overactivity, improve self-esteem, and feel better emotionally, try a regular exercise program. Structure and schedule your exercise, and determine to follow through and be consistent.

## **Dealing with Overactivity**

# **Helpful Hints**

If your career or work provides little opportunity to move around or physical activity, develop hobbies and past times that are very physically active, such as gardening, bicycling, jogging or walking, bowling, sports, hiking, etc.

## **Dealing with Overactivity**

# **Exercises for Managing Overactivity**

- 1.** Try an exercise program and exercise vigorously and regularly.
- 2.** Try taking physically active breaks from work. For example, take a walk around your office building or around the block.
- 3.** Practice relaxation techniques.
- 4.** Develop outlets for more physical activity.

## **Coping with Stress and Emotions**

Many ADD adults struggle with reactions to stressful circumstances, fluctuating moods, or too much anger. They may be too sensitive and reactive to stress, easily flustered, easily frustrated or provoked, and prone to angry outbursts or rapidly occurring negative moods. In addition, many ADD adults have an emotional problem such as depression or an anxiety condition in addition to ADD. For more severe emotional difficulties, counseling or psychotherapy should be sought. This section will outline strategies for coping with the typical emotional struggles that many ADD adults deal with on a daily basis.

### **Do you...**

- tend to be moody?
- tend to overreact to things?
- get flustered or upset easily?
- have “thin skin” (oversensitivity)?
- lose your temper a lot?
- become easily frustrated?
- become anxious in certain circumstances?
- feel overly stressed a lot?
- have recurring periods of depression or feeling down?

### **Then read on!**

## Coping with Stress and Emotions

### Important facts about emotions and stress reactions:

1. Emotions and stress usually begin with situations, events, and circumstances in our lives.
2. Nothing is automatically stressful or upsetting. Much of what distresses us lies in how we view or think about our circumstances. In other words, you feel the way you think.

Event ⇔ Thoughts ⇔ Emotional Reaction

The circumstances or situation linked to your stress or emotions

The view or interpretations, “self-talk”, that you have.

The feelings that result from your pattern of thinking or “self-talk.”

3. When you are feeling very upset or stressed, you may be overreacting to the situation due to the human tendency to think or view things irrationally at times. You may be “making mountains out of molehills.” Extreme thinking leads to extreme feelings.
4. You can change the way you feel by changing the way you think. When you are upset, try to link your emotions to your self-talk or way of viewing the situation. Look for exaggerations or extremes in your self-talk. Are you jumping to unlikely conclusions? Exaggerating the awfulness of things? Try to adopt a more realistic view of the situation. Change upsetting thoughts to calming thoughts.

## Coping with Stress and Emotions

# Upsetting Thoughts Calming Thoughts

The following example shows how exaggerated or unrealistic thoughts can lead to upsetting feelings or loss of control, and how alternative thoughts can help people remain calm and in control, or feeling less stressed:

### Upsetting Thoughts: Thoughts:

I can't stand it when he acts that way. It's awful!

I need him to do that!

Things never work out!

This shouldn't be this way!

### Calming

I don't like it when he acts that way, but I can handle it.

I want/desire/prefer him to do that, but I don't have to have what I want.

Sometimes things don't work out.

I wish it wasn't this way, but that's the way it is. I'll have to make the best of it.

Credit: Fleischman, Horne, and Arthur

## **Coping with Stress and Emotions**

### **An Exercise**

When you find yourself particularly stressed or upset, identify your thoughts that are linked to your feelings. Then, try to use alternative calming thoughts to help yourself to feel more appropriate emotions.

Now think of times during the past week when you felt stressed or upset. Write down the upsetting thought you had in the column below titled Upsetting Thoughts. Then list some alternative, calming thoughts that you could use instead in the column, Calming Thoughts.

**Upsetting Thoughts:**      **Calming Thoughts:**

## **Coping with Stress and Emotions**

# **Problem Solving**

Here is another way to deal with an upsetting situation. Use these steps each time you feel upset in a critical situation:

- Step One:      What is my goal?
- Step Two:      What am I doing now?
- Step Three:    Is what I'm doing helping me to achieve my goal?
- Step Four:     If it isn't, what do I need to do differently?

Credit: Fleischman, Horne, and Arthur

**Coping with Stress and Emotions**

**Try It Out**

**Situation:**

**What is my goal?**

**What am I doing now?**

**Is what I'm doing helping me to achieve my goal?**

**If it isn't, what do I need to do differently?**

## Coping with Stress and Emotions

# Preventing Bad Incidents

The following procedures will help keep you from doing or saying something destructive when you are angry.

1. **Recognize** when your frustration and angry feelings are growing.
2. **Get away** temporarily from the situation. Before you do or say anything you will regret, go somewhere quiet and take a few deep breaths or count to ten.
3. **Work** on your self-talk. Identify your upsetting thoughts and challenge them. Forcefully tell yourself calming thoughts, such as:

“Don’t take this so seriously—it isn’t the end of the world!”

“This isn’t really the worst thing in the world.”

“You can stand it even if you don’t like it.”

4. **Decide** what is in your long-term best interest to do. Often you are better off not to do anything for a while. Later on, when you are calmer, you can decide what to do.

These steps will help you to have better self-control when you are upset or angry.

Credit: Joyce Sichel

## **Other Ideas for Coping with Stress and Emotions:**

1. For those minor mood swings, it may help to focus on learning to tolerate bad moods, reminding yourself it will pass before long. Sometimes changing activities can help—like having a conversation with a friend, or some exercise, or taking a break and reading for a while.
2. Exercise can have very positive effects on emotions and coping with stress. See the article in this booklet on exercise.
3. Relaxation is a technique that can be very helpful for stress, anxiety, and anger. See the article in this booklet on relaxation.
4. There are many good books on achieving a better emotional life. One excellent book is The Feeling Good Handbook by David D. Burns, M.D.

## **Coping with Stress and Emotions**

### **Exercises for Better Coping with Stress and Emotions:**

1. Practice using the Upsetting Thoughts/Calming Thoughts technique for several distressing situations you have faced recently. Make two columns on a sheet of paper, one for Upsetting Thoughts and one for Calming Thoughts. Write down the upsetting thoughts linked to your bad feeling. In the opposite column, counter these upsetting thoughts with alternative calming thoughts. Daily practice will develop your skill in identifying upsetting self-talk and changing it, resulting in better feelings.
2. Practice the Problems Solving technique to deal with upsetting situations. Think of a few situations in which you could have used the steps to guide you to more effective dealing with upsetting circumstances. Write out your answers to the four questions on some paper.
3. Commit the Preventing Bad Incidents procedures to memory. Imagine using them in a few scenarios, picturing in your mind the event, your thoughts and feelings, and actions. See yourself successfully dealing with your frustration and anger.
4. Begin a program of exercise, relaxation, or both, and experience for yourself the many benefits of such habits.

## **ADD and Relationships**

Based on the research of Weiss and Hechtman, ADD adults have greater risk to:

- have interpersonal problems
- lack long-term close (intimate) relationships
- have more casual relationships—relationships that come and go
- have heterosexual relationships that tend to be brief and not significant
- when they marry, it may be to a caretaker who structures, organizes, and motivates them (this can work well—but not always)
- feel lonely, but not totally isolated
- have frequent disputes with peers, supervisors, family members.

## Relationships

# Problems and Patterns

**Common Problems:** Self-defeating patterns driven by symptoms of ADD. Often involve difficulties with communication and other issues (intimacy, emotions, etc.).

**Common Problematic Patterns:**

- Lack of receptivity, awareness, reflection on others thoughts and feelings.
- Too quick to assess other's communications.
- Impulsive interpersonal behaviors.
- Emotional issues—anger, etc.

## **Relationships**

### **Solutions/Strategies:**

- Learn and improve communication skills, problem-solving strategies, and conflict resolution abilities.
- Develop greater awareness of your own self-defeating patterns in communication and relationships, and develop strategies to catch yourself, change behavior patterns.
- In close relationships, recognize the ADD barriers. Talk about them with your significant other, and develop strategies to cope with them.
- Consider couples counseling with a therapist familiar with ADD.

## Relationships

# Therapy Plan for Relationship Issues

A therapist specializing in ADD treatment will be able to assist you in:

1. Identifying the role of ADD symptoms in relationship difficulties.
2. Educating you and your partner about the nature of ADD and serve as an “interpreter” to your partner.
3. Help to structure the environment.
4. Medication.
5. Individual counseling for maladaptive coping strategies.

# Medication

## **Introduction:**

Certain medications have been shown to be very helpful in the treatment of ADD. Their therapeutic effects reduce the core symptoms of ADD (inattention, impulsivity, overactivity) sometimes dramatically, and can improve co-existing problems such as depression as well. About 50% to 80% of adult ADD individuals experience moderate to marked improvement in their symptoms in response to one or another medication for ADD.

## **In this section:**

- About ADD medications
- The Decision to Take or Not to Take Medication
- When You Try a Medication
- For More Information

## Medication

# About ADD Medications

Medications commonly prescribed for ADD fall into two classes: stimulants and antidepressants. Both classes of medication have been shown to be effective in reducing ADD symptoms. They work to increase the amounts of certain neurochemicals in the brain and seem to boost the functioning of the regions responsible for ADD symptoms.

Stimulant medications are the most frequently prescribed and include Ritalin, Dexedrine, Cylert, and Adderall. Antidepressant medications that have been shown to be therapeutic for ADD include “tricyclic” antidepressants such as Norpramin and Tofranil, and other antidepressants such as Wellbutrin. Several other medications are sometimes helpful for ADD.

It is beyond the scope of the article to provide detailed information about the various medications and the pros and cons of each. The reader is referred to the books listed at the end of this section and to medical professionals for further information.

Medications definitely have a place in the therapy of moderate to severe ADD symptoms. Although there is a certain degree of risk and sometimes side effects with any medication, the benefits are often considerable and can be life changing. When treated with medication, it may be possible for an individual to achieve better concentration and functioning, become more productive and successful, have fewer emotional upheavals and relationship problems, and also feel much better about oneself as a result.

## **Medication**

# **The Decision to Take or Not to Take Medications**

Whether or not to try a medication for ADD is an individual decision. As with any medication, there will be concerns about possible risks and side effects. The medications most frequently prescribed for ADD such as Ritalin have been widely used for a long time and well studied, and have been found to be relatively safe, with few and mild, if any, side effects. In general, the positive benefits of taking medication must outweigh the side effects and risks in order to be worthwhile. A physician can explain more about the decision to take a medication.

## Medication

# When You Try a Medication

Response to medication varies from individual to individual. What works well for many ADD adults may not work well for you. There is often a range of possibilities for dosage and scheduling of when medication is taken. It is important that you work closely with your physician in order to find the best alternative. Each medication has its advantages and disadvantages.

Finding the right medication, right dosage, and right schedule for taking medication is an individual process and often requires a period of trial and error. Trying several different medications and dosages can be discomforting and frustrating at times. But in the end it is often well worth the time and effort.

Select a physician who has expertise and experience with adult ADD and with whom you feel you can work. Treating ADD with medication often requires some finesse, and not every doctor is skilled with ADD therapy. Communicate well with your doctor.

## Medication

# For More Information

Helpful information about medications for ADD can be found in the following books:

Driven to Distraction, Hallowell and Ratey, 1994.

Adult ADD, Whiteman and Novotni, 1995.

Out of the Fog: Treatment Options and Coping Strategies for Adult Attention Deficit Disorder, by Murphy and Levert, 1995.

## Miscellaneous

# Goal-Directed Persistence

One of the most common weaknesses in individuals with ADD is in the ability to “stick to it” when attempting to accomplish necessary (though possibly dull and boring) tasks, or “goal-directed persistence.”

If individuals with ADD are going to be successful in their job or schoolwork, then developing greater skill in goal-directed persistence is often necessary.

What can help? A few things might include:

- Self-management skills and tools such as project plans, clear written goals, prioritizing, schedules, lists, etc.
- Coaching—someone who can track with you and encourage you with your obligations, and help you in your efforts.
- Define goals and take orderly steps to reach them. Have basic goals and rewards (e.g. you can't go out to lunch until you've cleaned the kitchen).
- Break goals and projects down into written, step-by-step plans.
- Reflect on your goals frequently, reminding yourself of the advantages of accomplishing them.
- Monitor your progress, and keep your next step in mind.

**Miscellaneous**

**You Need These!**

## **Self-Management Skills**

**How To:**

Plan

Prioritize

Estimate time

Track progress

Set goals

Manage large projects

Use smart strategies

## Miscellaneous

# Aids for Managing Daily Affairs

1. Calendar
2. Daily schedule
3. “Things to Do” list
4. Money Management
  - record information about budget and expenses
  - collect receipts
  - bill paying
5. Medication list—record medications, information—dose, schedule, etc.
6. On the job information—record relevant information you need to perform tasks.

**Miscellaneous**

“Three of the best  
treatments for ADD  
are one-to-one tutoring,  
high motivation,  
and novelty.”

Miscellaneous

## ADHD and Motivation

1. **Incentive** makes a big difference in behavior.

Incentive exists when:

a) the task at hand is more interesting or fun than other things at that moment, or,

b) there is a predictable and meaningful reward and/or clearly stated rules with predictable and meaningful consequences.

\* The more worthwhile it seems to follow through on a task, the more likely it is to be accomplished.

2. **Supervision**

Supervision by another can also increase incentive and motivation.

The responsiveness of ADD people to incentive and supervision form the basis of increasing motivation. Think about how you can increase incentive or supervision in tasks where motivation is insufficient.

## Miscellaneous

# Vocational Issues

- Most adults with ADD have great strengths and potential if they find the right job.
- In what ways is your job or chosen career a good/bad fit for you, considering your ADD tendencies?
- Consider vocational assessment and counseling. Take into account ADD issues.
- Find ways of compensating and accommodating for your ADD tendencies.

## Miscellaneous

# ADD and Self-Esteem

1. **Where does poor self-esteem originate?**
  - An important factor is a history of growing up with criticism, rejection, failures, poor performance, being obnoxious, etc. (“lazy”, “crazy”, “stupid”, “flaky”).
  - Not living up to one’s potential.
  
2. **Reframing the past.**
  - Understand that your problems result from a mild neurological deficit that you have no control over, and not because you are “lazy”, “stupid”, etc.
  - You can make significant improvement now (getting control of ADD).
  
3. **Beware of faulty standards for self-worth.**
  - What do you base a person’s “worth” on? The #1 problem with self-esteem is having a faulty basis for self-esteem—one that is unrealistic. Dysfunctional thinking leads to feelings of inferiority.
  - To improve your self-esteem, identify and change negative thoughts and beliefs.
  - Accept yourself as you are—unconditionally.
  
4. **Tips**
  - List “what’s good about me” (strengths), “my most impressive qualities.”
  - Go with your strengths, not your weaknesses.
  
5. **See the “29 Positive Aspects of ADD” presented earlier in this booklet.**

## Procrastination and ADD

1. ADD people avoid activities that are boring, tedious, dull and seek those that are highly stimulating. Waiting until the last minute provides opportunity for both, unfortunately.
2. Self-talk helps fuel procrastination.  
Examples: "It's too hard." "I'll do it later."  
"I don't feel like it now."

Changing thinking patterns can reduce procrastination. Develop an "automatic attack attitude." "Do it now."

3. Goals can help reduce procrastination.  
Develop inspiring goals and reflect on them often.
4. Use rewards to motivate yourself to complete tasks.