



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ADULT ADHD

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Recognize and minimize the impact of adult ADHD in your everyday life.

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a condition that often starts in childhood. And as you grow into adulthood, the symptoms typically follow. But as an adult, ADHD symptoms create very different challenges. Symptoms of ADHD in adults like inattention, hyperactivity, and forgetfulness become more than obstacles to be overcome at school. Those symptoms can start to seriously disrupt every aspect of day-to-day adult life, tripping you up at home, at work, in relationships, and in other areas.

Just how does ADHD manifest in adult life? Read our story of Susan, a profile we've created to represent a typical adult dealing with adult ADHD. Do you see yourself in any of her struggles?

Morning Mad Dash . . .

It's 6:00 a.m. when Susan's alarm goes off. She has to get up and get to work by 8:00, but somehow she's always late. She showers and gets dressed. But she's late getting out the door because she can't find anything. She forgot to wash clothes last night, so she struggles to find something presentable to wear. She can't find the sales brief she worked on the night before, or the bill she needs to mail, or her keys. And she needs to stop and get gas on the way to work. The clock is ticking, and Susan feels rushed. She grabs some spare keys and heads out the door. While driving to work, she listens to the radio and thinks about her to-do list. Her cell phone rings, startling her deep reverie and a driver honks when she drifts momentarily into his lane. Her thoughts are racing, and she feels distracted the whole drive to work.

Driven to Distraction

Susan suffers from some classic symptoms of ADHD in adults. Chronic lateness, inattentiveness, and frequent distractibility are hallmark signs of adult ADHD. And Susan is definitely distracted and forgetful. Disorganization and inattention to detail make it hard for her to get ready and be on time for work and other obligations. She's typically late and misplaces things. And her mind wanders while she's driving -- which can be dangerous. Together, all of Susan's ADHD symptoms mean that her mornings get off to a rocky start.

A Difficult Workday . . .

It's Monday afternoon in the office, and Susan has a meeting soon. She can't find the sales figures she's supposed to take. Her desk is cluttered and disorganized. In the meeting, Susan has a hard time paying attention when others are speaking. The manager asks her a question, but she doesn't hear, because she's lost in her thoughts. Her mind wanders, and she fidgets. Her inner restlessness is worse than usual. When the manager starts talking about the sales figures, Susan interrupts to ask a question about something else. By the end of the day, Susan feels bad for not getting more done.

Fidgety and Restless

Susan's symptoms are typical of an adult living with ADHD. She is distracted and disorganized and has trouble listening and paying attention. Although she knows a lot about her job and the market her company competes in, Susan's symptoms make sitting through and contributing to a work meeting difficult. Fidgeting and interrupting when others are speaking can be symptoms of adult ADHD. So can inner restlessness, especially when it's so strong that it's impossible to concentrate and sit still. Adults are less likely than kids to be hyperactive. Instead, they may feel restless, on edge, and unable to relax.

Beyond the Job . . .

Susan packs up at the end of the day and prepares to go home. She stops at the grocery store to pick up the ingredients her husband needs to make dinner. Walking up and down the aisles, Susan loads her cart with sales items she just can't pass up. She checks out and heads home. When she gets there, her husband notices that she forgot several things he needs to make dinner. He also asks why she bought so many things on sale that they don't really need. The couple is in debt from Susan's overspending. Susan gets angry and defensive but then feels bad about it later.

Impulsive and Emotional

Susan forgot what she went shopping for, yet came home with a bunch of things she didn't need. Trouble remembering things, like a shopping list, and overspending are two additional common outcomes of ADHD symptoms. The ADHD symptom of impulsivity can manifest as impulse shopping -- and lead to financial troubles. And emotional reactivity is often a feature of ADHD in adults. Irritability, sensitivity to criticism, and low self-esteem may go hand in hand with the disorder.

Minimize symptoms of adult ADHD with lifestyle changes and professional help

Work, money, relationships, emotional well-being, and health -- ADHD in adults can affect many areas of your life. And when you've been living with adult ADHD for a long time, it's easy to get used to the chaos it causes. But here's the reality: It's not okay for ADHD symptoms to disrupt your life. You don't have to "just live with it." And there are many things you can do to minimize your symptoms and improve all areas of your life. Use these strategies to get control of ADHD:

Exercise. Physical activity is a great way for anyone to reduce stress and burn off excess energy. But it's especially beneficial for those coping with ADHD in adults. It's a great outlet for the restless, often boundless energy that people living with adult ADHD tend to have. It also boosts blood flow to the brain, enhances your mood, and decreases anxiety. What's more, exercise helps improve alertness and focus. Aim for at least 30 minutes of brisk walking, jogging, or cycling every day.

Sleep. Many people who have ADHD also have problems with sleep. You may not get enough sleep, or you may wake up feeling unrefreshed. People living with adult ADHD also have higher rates of sleep disorders, including restless legs syndrome (RLS) and sleep apnea. Sleep problems and ADHD can aggravate one another, creating a cycle of

worsening symptoms, so make sleep a priority. If you have trouble getting 7 to 8 solid hours a night, talk with your doctor.

Relax. Stress is something we all deal with it, but it takes a greater toll on people living with adult ADHD. That's because the symptoms of ADHD in adults cause stress, and stress exacerbates ADHD symptoms. Break the stress cycle by doing something relaxing every day. Here are a few strategies that can improve mood, decrease nervous energy, and increase focus.

Eat better. Several studies suggest that people who have ADHD may benefit from eating a diet that includes omega-3 fatty acids, complex carbohydrates, and good-quality protein. Limiting your intake of sugar, simple carbohydrates, and food additives may help as well.

Get organized. Stacks of paperwork, piles of clutter, a succession of lost items, missed deadlines, and unfinished tasks -- these are the signs of ADHD. And that can be pretty stressful. So it's time to get organized. Find a system that works for you. If you'd like to go paperless, turn to technology. Use computer programs to keep track of your schedule; the names, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers of your contacts; the dates of birthdays and anniversaries; and other information. Pay bills online with automatic bill pay whenever possible. Use software programs that create lists for you and set alarms and reminders to help you stay on track. Find a program that syncs to your Smartphone, if you have one. Let these electronic devices pinch-hit for your brain when you're feeling overwhelmed.

Or if paper records are more your style, use file folders, day planners, labels, and a good color coding system. A good rule to live by? Develop a system that means you touch every piece of paper that comes across your desk only once. Pay bills, answer correspondence, and toss out junk mail immediately to keep paper from piling up. Set aside 20 minutes every day to organize and keep clutter to a minimum. If you're still overwhelmed, hire a professional organizer to help you sort things out.

Develop your skills. ADHD in adults causes problems with executive function, which is the ability to organize, plan, pay attention to details, and manage time. Working with an ADHD coach or skills trainer can help you improve in these and other areas. Trainers may come to your home or conduct sessions over the phone or via e-mail. They can also teach you skills to improve communication, boost productivity, manage stress, and deal with procrastination.

Taking Control.

Living with adult ADHD doesn't have to interfere with your everyday life. Lifestyle changes and ADHD treatment professionals can help you get better control of your symptoms. And all those areas that were once a source a stress can start to feel satisfying, productive, and under control.