

## So I've Got ADHD. Now What? Tips To Control Adult ADHD

By John Schinnerer, PhD  
Guide To Self, Inc.

So you think you may have ADHD, or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. The first step is to educate yourself. If you have a spouse, or significant other, help to educate him or her by providing them with some of the publications (listed below). Do some research. If the information provided hits home and the description of ADHD fits you, visit your physician and discuss the possibility with him or her.

### Get An Accurate Diagnosis

Second, get a thorough and accurate diagnosis. This consists of filling out behavior checklists similar to the one you did for this test. The difference is that the doctor or psychologist will have you and a loved one (and perhaps a coworker or parent) fill out a behavior rating scale to see if the ADHD symptoms are present in all environments.

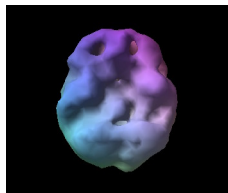
### Discuss The Possibility of Medication With Your Doctor

Once an official diagnosis has been made, the third step is for you and your physician to consider appropriate medications, which will increase your attention span, decrease distractibility, decrease restlessness, decrease irritability, increase motivation, and improve overall functioning. These medications are the same ones used with children, just larger doses typically. They include stimulants such as Ritalin (generic name: methylphenidate), Adderall – sustained release (generic name: amphetamine salt combination), and Dexedrine – sustained release (generic name: dextroamphetamine slow-release caps).

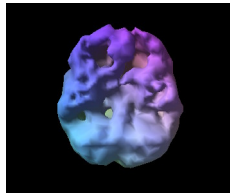
Contrary to popular belief, these are very safe (and necessary for ADHD individuals) medications. The Physicians Desk Reference lists 60 milligrams as the top dosage for Ritalin and 40 mgs as the top dosage for Adderall and Dexedrine. The maximum safe dosage is much higher, however. Be aware that it is not advised to take stimulants with citrus juices (orange, grapefruit, lemon) or anything with citric acid in it. This tends to lessen the effect of the medication. Also be aware of and reduce your caffeine intake when taking a stimulant. Caffeine and stimulants together will usually overstimulate the nervous system.

There is currently a clinical investigation of the efficacy of a new drug called atomoxetine, which is a norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor that was just approved by the U.S. FDA in November of 2002. This has been shown to be effective in the adult population in reducing impulsivity, inattentiveness and distractibility. While more research is needed, it provides families with another course of action to treat ADHD. Atomoxetine will be the first drug available specifically for ADHD that is not a stimulant and thus, offers a reduced risk of addiction. Up to date information can be gathered on this new drug from the web and from your physician.

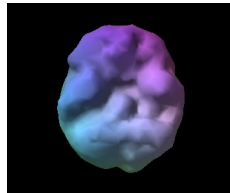
### Brain Scans of an ADHD Individual Under Different Conditions



ADHD brain at rest. Blood flow looks pretty good.



ADHD brain while concentrating. Blood leaves pre-frontal cortex.



ADHD on medication (Adderall) while concentrating. Blood flow is restored to the prefrontal cortex.

The brain scans above demonstrate the movement of blood throughout the ADHD brain under different conditions. In the first figure, on the far left side, is a scan of the underside of an ADHD brain at rest. The overall blood flow looks pretty good, about 90% of normal, to all areas of the brain.

The middle figure shows the blood leaving the prefrontal cortex (note the two holes at the top of the scan) when the ADHD person is asked to concentrate on a task, such as an uninteresting work-related task. Blood flow to the prefrontal cortex is necessary to prioritize, organize, plan ahead, pay attention, and weigh options prior to acting. Without the necessary blood flow, this individual cannot effectively perform such actions.

The final figure, on the far right side, is a scan of an ADHD individual, on a prescribed stimulant (in this case Adderall) while concentrating on a work-related task. These scans illustrate the fact that ADHD is not just in your mind. In addition, the series of scans also illustrate the point that medication is highly effective for helping mitigate the effects of ADHD.

### **Additional Recommendations**

It is a wise idea to read up on the latest in accommodations, treatment and therapy for adults with ADHD. The field of ADHD changes quickly and what makes good sense today, may not tomorrow.

The nature of accommodations for an adult with ADHD is similar to those put into effect for a child with ADHD in the classroom. While we would not put a token reward system into place at work, we might seek to increase the accountability to supervisors on a more immediate, frequent and tangible basis.

### **Get Immediate Feedback**

Immediate and frequent feedback from supervisors will serve to help maintain focus on the task at hand.

### **Break Down Tasks**

In addition, it is helpful to break down projects into smaller, more manageable steps. In this way, you only have to focus for limited periods of time and will be able to successfully complete portions of a project, thereby leading to the successful completion of the entire project.

### **Increase Personal Accountability**

Other helpful steps might include having the individual state his or her goals for the entire day (or for a half day) to their supervisor beforehand. This allows for increased accountability. The supervisor can check in periodically to review progress, and consequences can be made contingent upon completion of the goals.

### **Think Of Your Brain As A Computer**

The analogy of the brain as a computer is helpful. In order for a computer to run any program at peak efficiency, it must have sufficient memory, disk space and processing speed. Many individuals with problems of impulsivity, disorganization, and distractibility do not have sufficient RAM (i.e., short-term memory), disk space (i.e., long-term memory) or processing speed in their brains due to underactivity in the prefrontal and temporal lobes of the brain. To best run the programs, the hardware (the brain) must be first optimized and then the programs (the information) need to be reinstalled (as it wasn't properly received the first time through). Once the

brain is running efficiently, strategies need to be introduced to help them be more effective at home, at work and in social relationships. It is essential to improve the brain (biological), the outlook of the individual (psychological), and the intersections between the person and their environment (social) (Amen, 2001).

### **Eliminate Toxic Elements**

You should strongly consider eliminating all toxic elements from your lifestyle. This includes caffeine, alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamines, nicotine, and sugars. For instance, marijuana use damages the physiology of the brain decreasing blood flow to key areas and reducing overall effectiveness. Marijuana use is especially harmful to the temporal lobes, which play an important role in memory, emotional stability, learning and temper control. Substance abuse of all kinds is particularly harmful to brain functioning. For example, a study done at UCLA demonstrated that cocaine addicts had 23 percent less brain activity overall compared to a group of people who had never used drugs (Amen, 2001). At minimum, you must consider using only legal substances in moderation, never in excess.

### **Improve Your Diet**

The recommended diet according to many experts, including Barry Sears, PhD (author of *The Zone*) is a higher protein – lower carbohydrate diet with a minimum of sugars. This helps promote a more even mood, better focus, and improved cognitive ability. However, this is precisely the opposite form of diet that most of us are on currently.

### **Exercise**

All of us benefit from intense aerobic exercise 30-45 minutes 5 times a week. Exercise increases blood flow to the brain. It also improves the availability of serotonin to your brain which provides a calming effect and allows individuals to shift their focus from one area to another more easily. This helps those who tend to obsess on certain thoughts or 'overfocus' on areas of interest.

### **Counseling**

Psychotherapy aimed at precise goals. These themes include breaking up incorrect belief patterns, coaching to develop good internal organization skills, and diaphragmatic breathing. Many people who are distractible and disorganized may have persistent false beliefs that ruin their chances for success in the here and now. As an example, they may believe they are doomed to have poor interpersonal relationships, because that is what happened prior to their changing old patterns. Beliefs drive behavior. The goal here is to change the negative beliefs to positive ones and to reduce the associated anxiety. Coaching can be very powerful in helping individuals to set appropriate goals, improve organization, planning and consistent performance. Diaphragmatic breathing is a method of deep breathing where you breathe into the stomach or diaphragm. The emphasis is on exhaling all air in your lungs with each breath. This technique increase oxygen to the brain and body, lessens temper flare-ups, and reduces impulsivity and increases the ability to think clearly.

### **Social Skill Training**

Social skill training can be very helpful in teaching proper communication skills (including active listening), teaching self-monitoring techniques, directly working on decreasing aggressive behaviors, and increasing awareness of acceptable behaviors.

## Stop Thinking Negatively

Work on correcting your Automatic Negative Thoughts, or ANTs. Negativity haunts us all at different times. This habit, when particularly strong, can lead to depression and social withdrawal. There are seven primary types of ANTs as laid out below:

**Figure 1. Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs)**

ANT	Type of ANT	How to counter the ANT
"I'm the worst at sports."	"All or nothing" thinking	This is not a rational thought. I'm not the worst. I just need more practice. Then, I'll improve.
"She is always mad at me."	"Always" thinking	Watch for words like "always," "never," "no one," "everyone," "every time," and "everything."
"Others will just laugh at me and I'll look stupid."	Fortune telling	Predicting the worst possible outcome. Replace negative thought with a positive image in your head ("They might like what I have to say."). Learn deep breathing techniques (e.g., diaphragmatic breathing).
"I know she doesn't like me."	Mind reading	Belief that you know what someone else is thinking. Remind yourself you can't know another's thoughts. Reframe the situation more positively. "She might like me. Maybe she is having a bad day."
"I'm worthless."	Labeling	I may do some dumb things, but I'm not worthless. Similar to 'All or nothing' thinking.
"It's all my the fault of my boss."	Blaming	What part did I play in creating the problem and how can we best solve it?
"I should do better in school."	Guilt obsessions	Watch out for the words "should," "ought," and "have to." Reframe thought as "I want to...", "It would be helpful to...", or "It's in my best interests to..."

## Summary

In summary, the diagnosis of any mental disorder may be earth-shattering news at first. Yet, it is also the beginning of the healing process. None of us are 'normal'. Everyone is a little crazy, to some degree, in some manner. And when you know what your tendencies are, you have more power over them. Greater self-knowledge gives you more options. Good luck!

**If you would like to discuss this information further, please feel free to email us at [Coaching@GuideToSelf.com](mailto:Coaching@GuideToSelf.com), or call us at 650-312-1742. We're happy to help!**

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.  
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.