

Tips for managing symptoms of ADHD

Nutrition – Promote optimal brain health by improving eating habits. A poor diet can exacerbate symptoms of ADHD. By making simple changes in what and how you eat, you may experience significant reductions in distractibility, hyperactivity, and stress levels

- Be sure to get three balanced nutritional meals each day. Set alarms on your phone if you are likely to forget to eat.
- Eat healthy protein with every meal.
- Omega-3 fatty acids (found in fish like salmon or tuna, or supplements) help support optimal brain functioning
- It can also help to eat multiple small meals throughout the day.
- Limit added sugar, highly processed foods and artificial sweeteners. Try to eat foods as close to their natural state as possible.
- Develop a list of healthy and portable snack foods (apples, almonds, string cheese, low-fat Greek yogurt, etc.)

Hydration

- Try to drink half your body weight in ounces each day (spread out throughout the day).
- Avoid energy drinks, soda or other drinks with lots of caffeine, calories and sugar.
- Carry a water bottle with you to help ensure that you are hydrating throughout the day.

Exercise – helps reduce hyperactivity and inattention. Exercise can also relieve stress, boost your mood and calm your mind.

- Try to exercise for at least 20 minutes each day most days of the week.
- Schedule exercise like an appointment.
- Some exercise/movement is better than none. Taking a brisk walk or doing something physically active at home can also improve functioning.
- Use exercise in between work blocks to improve energy and attention.
- Increase stress relief by exercising outdoors. People with ADHD often benefit from sunshine and being outside in nature.
- Try relaxing forms of exercise such as mindful walking, yoga or tai chi.

Sleep – Promote optimal brain health by improving sleep. Sleep deprivation can increase symptoms of ADHD, reducing your ability to cope with stress and maintain focus during the day.

- Go to bed and wake up each day at approximately the same time. Consistency is most important for attention and cognitive functioning.
- Plan a wind-down period of 30-45 minutes prior to falling asleep in which electronic devices are turned off. Light stimulates the brain and can disrupt circadian rhythms, which can lead to less restful and restorative sleep.

- Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night.
- Avoid caffeine late in the day.

Attention

- Write down facts/information/action items rather than trying to keep them in your head.
- Break work into blocks of approximately 2 hours each. During each work block, take 3-5 minute breaks every 20 minutes by getting up, walking around and taking a drink of water. Do not use electronics on your breaks.
- Experiment with optimal levels of background noise/stimulation for tasks. Consider using background music. If you need to eliminate noise, noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs can be helpful.
- During your 2 hour work blocks, try changing tasks/topics each hour. For example, if you need to work on two different projects, focus on one for 1 hour and then switch to the next project for the second hour.
- Schedule exercise between work blocks or right before an important work block. Capitalize on the endorphins that are produced during exercise to help make a work block more productive.
- Schedule work for the times of day that you are most productive.
- Avoid multi-tasking (dividing attention) as much as possible. Complete one task before moving on to the next.
- Write things down and make lists.
- Take notes during workshops, important meetings, or in situations that you need to retain knowledge. Use recording devices in order to decrease demands on divided attention.
- Learn how to take notes effectively and efficiently, and focus on important facts rather than just trying to passively transcribe all information.
- Keep your workspace clutter free.

Memory

- Write things down.
- Utilize alarms on your phone to help you remember certain tasks.
- Avoid cramming. Build in time for multiple opportunities to actively engage with material prior to a test or exam.

Executive Functioning

- Get organized. Create an organization strategy that is realistic to implement and keep up with long term. Organized spaces make things easier to find, reduce anxiety, reduce strain on relationships and increase productivity. Utilizing organizational apps or ADHD apps on your phone can also be helpful.
- Stop to think through and concretely develop a plan before tackling a problem, or going through a day/week, or completing a task. Plan to use the most effective/efficient strategy when possible rather than just focusing on getting something done (i.e., do not sacrifice quality for speed).

- Use a calendar, paper planner or electronic scheduling app to prioritize tasks, monitor task completion, keep track of appointments, due dates, etc.
- Build in a few minutes every morning (or the night before) to plan task priorities before starting the day.
- Give yourself extra time. People with ADHD often overestimate how much time it will take to complete tasks. For every 30 minutes you think it will take to complete a task, give yourself an extra 10 minutes.
- Utilize auto-payments as much as possible for monthly bills to avoid missing payments.
- Use a filing system to organize important paperwork. Color coding files can be helpful.
- Plan to leave early for appointments. Aim to arrive 15 minutes early for appointments. Make sure you have everything you need ahead of time so you are not frantically looking for your keys or phone when it is time to go.
- Break large tasks into smaller, more manageable tasks.
- Stay on task. Avoid getting sidetracked by sticking to your schedule, using a timer to enforce it if necessary.
- Set aside time for organization. Having a messy environment is distracting. Plan 10 minutes a day to clear your desk and organize paperwork.
- Prioritize. More important tasks should be placed first on your to-do list.
- Create a daily routine. Having a daily routine can help your day to run smoothly.
- Create a routine for chores. Schedule regular chores like laundry, dishes and tidying up to help avoid getting overwhelmed with clutter and tasks.
- Create a drop spot or landing pad for items you usually misplace or lose. For example, create a place to put your keys, phone, wallet, etc. Having a drop spot by your front door helps reduce time looking for important items before needing to leave.

Stress Management

- Practice mindfulness. Utilizing mindfulness meditation on a regular basis can help reduce stress, better resist distractions, lower impulsivity, improve your focus, and provide more control over your emotions.

Medication Management

- The most effective evidence-based treatment to reduce symptoms of ADHD is medication management. Discuss medication options with your physician or psychiatrist.