

Fifty Tips on the Management of Adult Attention Deficit Disorder

Insight & Education

1. **Be sure of the diagnosis.** Make sure you're working with a professional who really understands ADD and has excluded related or similar conditions, such as anxiety states, agitation depression, hyperthyroidism, manic-depressive illness, or obsessive -- compulsive disorder.
2. **Educate yourself.** Perhaps the single most powerful treatment for ADD is understanding ADD in the first place. Read books. Talk with professions. Talk with other adults who have ADD. These may be found through ADD support groups are local or national ADD organizations like CHADD. It able to design your own treatment that your own version of ADD.
3. **Choose a coach.** It's useful for you to have a coach, for some person near to keep after you, but always with humor. Your couch can help you be get organized, stay on task, give encouragement, or remind you get back to work. Friend, colleague, or therapists, open (it is possible, but risky, for your coach to be your spouse), a coach is someone who stays on you to get things done, exhorts you as coaches do, keeps tabs on you, and in general stands in your corner. A coach can be tremendously helpful in treating ADD.
4. **Seek encouragement.** ADD adults need lots of encouragement. This is in part due to many self doubts that have accumulated over the years. That goes beyond that. More than most people, ADD adults wither or without encouragement and thrive when they get. They will off often work for another person in a way they won't work for themselves. This is not "bad," it just is. It should be recognized and take advantage of.
5. **Realize what ADD is not** -- i.e., conflict of mother, unconscious fear of success, passive --aggressive personality, etc. People with ADD, of course, may have a conflict of their mother or unconscious fear of success, or have passive -- aggressive personality, but it's important to separate the ADD from these other kinds of problems because the treatment of ADD is completely different.
6. **Educate and involve others.** Just as those key for you to understand ADD, is equally if not more important for those around you to understand it --family, job, school, friends. Once they get in the concept, they will be able to understand much better and to help you reach your goals.
7. **Give up guilt** over high-stimulus-seeking behavior. Understand that you are drawn to intense stimuli. Try to choose them wisely, rather than brooding over the "bad" ones.
8. **Listen to feedback from trusted others.** Adults (and children too) with ADD are notoriously poor self observers they use a lot of what can appear to be denial.

9. **Consider joining or starting a support group.** Much of the most useful information about ADD has not yet found its way into books, but remains stored in the minds of people who have ADD. In groups, this information can come out. Plus, groups are really helpful in getting the kind of support is so badly needed.
10. **Try to get rid of the negativity** that may have just infested your system. If you had lived for years without knowing that what you had was ADD a good psychotherapist may help in this regard.
11. **Don't feel chained to conventional careers** or conventional ways of coping. Give yourself permission to be yourself. Give up trying to be the person you always thought you should be--the model student or the organized executive, for example, and let yourself be who you are.
12. Remember that **what you have is neurological condition.** It is genetically transmitted. This is caused by biology, by how your brain is wired. It is not a disease of the will nor of moral failing, nor some kind of neurosis. It is not caused by weakness of character, nor by a failure to mature. It's cure or is not to be found in the power of the will, nor in punishment, nor in sacrifice, nor in pain. Always remember this. Try as they might, many people with ADD have great trouble accepting the syndrome has been rooted in biology rather than in weakness of character.
13. **Try to help others with ADD.** You learn a lot about the condition in the process and while as well as still good about yourself too.

Performance Management

14. **Establish external structure.** Structure is the hallmark of non-pharmacological treatment of ADD child. It can be equally useful with adults. Once in place, structure works like the walls of the bobsled slide, keeping the speedball slide from careening off the track. Make frequent use of lists, notes to self, color coding, rituals, reminders, files and patterned planning.
15. **Color Code:** Use pizzazz. Try to make your as peppy as you want it to be. If your organization system can be stimulating, (imagine that!) instead of boring, then you will be more likely to follow it. For example, in setting up try color coding. Mentioned above, color coding deserves emphasis. Many people of ADD are visually oriented. Take advantage of this by making things memorable with color: files, memoranda, text, schedules, etc. Virtually anything in the black-and-white of type can be made more memorable, arresting, and therefore *attention getting* with color.
16. **Use the principal of OHIO:** only handle it once. When you receive a document or a memo of any kind of written material, only handle it once. Either respond to right away on the spot, or through the document away, or file it prominently. Do not put it in a *to do* box or pile for people with ADD, *to do* piles might just be as well be called never done pile. They

- serve as little menaces around one's desk or room, silently building guilt, anxiety, and resentment, as well taking up a lot of space. Get in the habit of acting immediately on your paperwork. Make the wrenching decision to throw something away. Or, overcome inertia and respond to it on the spot. Whatever you do with the document when ever possible, only handle it once.
17. **Set up your environment to award** rather than deflate. To understand what a deflating environment is, most adult ADDers only need to think back to school. Now that you have the freedom of adulthood, try to set things up so you will not constantly be reminded of your limitations.
 18. **Some things will fail, and that is OK:** Acknowledge and anticipate the inevitable collapse of X per cent of projects undertaken, relationships entered into, and obligations incurred. Better that you anticipate these failures, rather than be surprised by them and brood over them. Think of them as part of the cost of doing business.
 19. **Embrace challenges.** ADD people thrive, with many challenges. As long as you know they won't all pan out, as long as you don't get too perfectionistic and fussy, you'll get a lot done, and stay out of trouble. Far better that you be too busy than not busy enough. As the old saying goes, if you want to get something done, ask a busy person.
 20. **Make deadlines.**
 21. **Break down large tasks and to small ones.** Attach deadlines to the small parts. Then, like magic, the large tasks will get done. This is one of the simplest and most powerful of all structuring devices. Often a large task will feel overwhelming to the person with ADD. The mere thought of trying to perform the task makes one turn away. On the other hand, if the large task is broken down into small parts, each component may feel quite manageable. (For example, it was only by using this technique that we managed to write this book.).
 22. **Prioritize rather than procrastinate.** Handle it only once, and be sure to prioritize. When things get busy, but adult ADD person loses perspective. Paying unpaid parking ticket can feel is pressing is putting out a fire that just got started in the wastebasket. Sometimes one becomes paralyzed. Prioritize. To get deep breaths. Put first things first. Then go on to the second and third task. Don't stop. Procrastination is one of the hallmarks of adult ADD. You have to realize, and really discipline yourself to watch out for it and avoid it.
 23. **Except the fear of things going too well.** Except edginess when things are too easy, and there's no conflict. Don't gum things up just to make things more stimulating.
 24. **Notice how and where you work best:** in a noisy room, on the train, wrapped in three blankets, listening to music, whatever. Children and adults with ADD can do their best under rather odd conditions. Let yourself work, under whatever conditions are best for you.
 25. **Know that is okay to do two things at once:** carry on a conversation and knit, or take a shower and do your best thinking, or jag and plan a

- business meeting. Often people with ADD need to be doing several things at once in order to get things done at all.
26. **Do what you're good at.** Again, if it seems easy, that's OK. There's no rule that says you can only do what your bad at.
 27. **Leave time between engagements to gather, your thoughts.** Transitions are difficult for ADDers, and breaks can help ease the transitions.
 28. **Keep a notepad in your car, by your bed, and in your pocketbook or jacket.** We never know when a good idea will come to you, or you want to remember something--so jot it down.
 29. **Read with pen in hand:** not only for marginal notes or underlining, but for the inevitable cascade of "other" thoughts that will occur to you.

Mood Management

30. **Have structured "blow-out" time.** Set aside some time in every week for just letting go. Whatever you like to do--blasting yourself with loud music, taking a trip to the racetrack, having a feast--pick some kind of activity from time to time where you can let loose in a safe way.
31. **Recharge your batteries.** Related to number 30, most adults with ADD need, on a daily basis, some time to waste without feeling guilty about it. One guilt-free way to conceptualize it is to call it time to recharge your batteries. Take a nap, watch TV, and meditate. Something calm, restful, at ease.
32. **Choose "good," helpful addictions, such as exercise.** Many adults with ADD have an addictive or compulsive personality such that they are always hooked on something. Try to make this something positive.
33. **Understand mood changes and ways to manage these.** Know you're your moods will change willy-nilly, independent of what's going on in the external world. Don't waste your time looking for someone to blame. Focus rather on learning to tolerate a bad mood, knowing that it will pass, and learning strategies to make it pass sooner. Change sets, i.e., get involved with some new activity (preferably interactive), such as a conversation with a friend or a tennis game, or reading a book.
34. **Related to number 33, recognize the following cycle,** which is very common among adults with ADD:
 - a. Something "startles" your psychological system, a change or transition, a disappointment or even a success. The precipitant may be quite trivial, nothing more than a everyday event.
 - b. This "startle" is followed by a mini-panic with a sudden loss of perspective, the world being set topsy-turvy.
 - c. You try to deal with this panic by falling into a mode of obsessing and ruminating over one or another aspect of the situation. This can last for hours, days, even months.

To break the negative obsessing, have a list of friends to call. Have a few videos that always engross you and get your mind off things. Have a ready access to exercise. Have a punching bag of pillow handy if there's extra angry energy. Rehearse a few pep talks you can give yourself, like, "you've been here before. These are the ADD blues. They will soon pass. You are OK."

35. **Learn to name your feelings.** Many people with ADD, particularly men, get frustrated and angry because they cannot put their feelings into words. With practice and coaching, this is a skill that can be learned.
36. **Expect depression after success.** People with ADD commonly complain of feeling depressed, paradoxically, after a big success. This is because the high stimulus of the chase or the challenge or the preparation is over. The deed is done. Win or lose the adult with ADD misses the conflict, the high stimulus, and feels depressed.
37. **Learn symbols, slogans sayings** as shorthand ways of labeling and quickly putting into perspective slipups, mistakes, or mood swings. When you turn left instead of right and take your family on a twenty-minute detour, it is better to be able to say, "There goes my ADD again," than to have a six hour fight over your unconscious desire to sabotage the whole trip. These are not excuses. You still have to take responsibility for your actions. It is just good to know where your actions are coming from and where they're not.
38. **Use "timeouts," with children.** When you are upset or over stimulated, take a time-out. Go away. Calm down.
39. **Learn how to advocate for yourself.** Adults with ADD are so used to being criticized; they are often unnecessarily defensive in putting their own case forward. Learn to get off the defensive.
40. **Avoid premature closure** of a project, a conflict, a deal or a conversation. Don't "cut to the chase" too soon, even though you're itching to.
41. **Try to let a successful moment last** and be remembered and become sustaining over time. You'll have to train yourself consciously and deliberately to do this because you'll naturally tend to forget your success as you brood over your shortcomings or pessimistically anticipate the worst.
42. **Remember that ADD usually includes a tendency to over-focus** or hyper focus at times. This hyper focusing can be used constructively or destructively. Be aware of its destructive use: a tendency to obsess or ruminate over some imagined problem without being able to let it go.
43. **Exercise vigorously and regularly.** You should schedule exercise into your life and stick with it. It helps you work off excess energy and aggression in a positive way, it allows for noise reduction within the mind, it stimulates the hormonal and neuro chemical system in a most therapeutic way, and it soothes and calms the body. When you add all that to the well-known health benefits of exercise, you can see how important exercise is. Make it something fun so you can stick with it over the long

haul, i.e., the rest of your life. One particular form of exercise, sexual activity, is very good for ADD.

Interpersonal Life

44. **Make a good choice in significant other.** Obviously, this is good advice for anyone. But it is striking how the adult with ADD can thrice of flounder depending on the choice of mate.
45. **Learn to joke with yourself** and others about your various symptoms, from forgetfulness to getting lost all the time to being tactless or impulsive. If you can bring a sense of humor to your failings others will forgive you much more quickly.
46. **Schedule activities with friends.** Adhere to these schedules faithfully. It is crucial for you to keep connected to other people.
47. **Find and join groups where you are liked,** appreciated, understood, enjoyed. Even more than most people, people with ADD take great strength from group support.
48. **Don't stay too long where you aren't understood** or appreciated. Just people with ADD gain a great deal from supportive groups, they are particularly drained and demoralized by negative groups, and they have a tendency to stay with them too long, vainly trying to make things work out, even when all the evidence shows they can't.
49. **Pay compliments.** Notice other people. In general, get social training if you're having trouble getting along with people.
50. **Set social deadlines.** Without deadlines and dates your social life can atrophy. Just as your will be helped by structuring your business week, so, too, you will benefit from keeping your social calendar organized. This will help you stay in touch with friends and get the kind of social support your need.

*From the book: Driven to Distraction by Edward M. Hallowell, M.D. and John J. Ratey, M.D.