

# Bad Habits or Executive Function Issues?

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ADULT ADHD?

Email them to [attention@chadd.org](mailto:attention@chadd.org) and highly qualified experts will respond.

Since I was a child I have tended to blurt out whatever comes into my mind. Not everyone appreciates my sense of humor, and I've even lost friends because of things I've said. How can I learn to think before I speak?

Interrupting or talking out of turn can be an issue with your brain's executive functions. Executive functions are found in the frontal lobe of your brain, and the two main things they are responsible for are self-regulation and inhibition.

Self-regulation includes tasks such as refocusing or redirecting your attention if you find yourself off task or keeping your mood on an

even keel. Inhibition is the ability to prevent a behavior from happening (such as saying whatever is on your mind).

Inhibition acts as a filter for what you say.

Studies have found stimulant medication to be most effective at helping improve executive function performance in ADHD. While stimulant medication has been found to be the most effective treatment, nonmedication treatments also include exercise, Omega 3-6-9 supplements, and mindfulness meditation. You may also find that cognitive-behavioral therapy helps you respond better after a blurting incident—for example, by apologizing without getting too down on yourself.

Stephanie Moulton Sarkis, PhD, NCC, LMHC | Psychotherapist | Author, *10 Simple Solutions to Adult ADD* (2011)

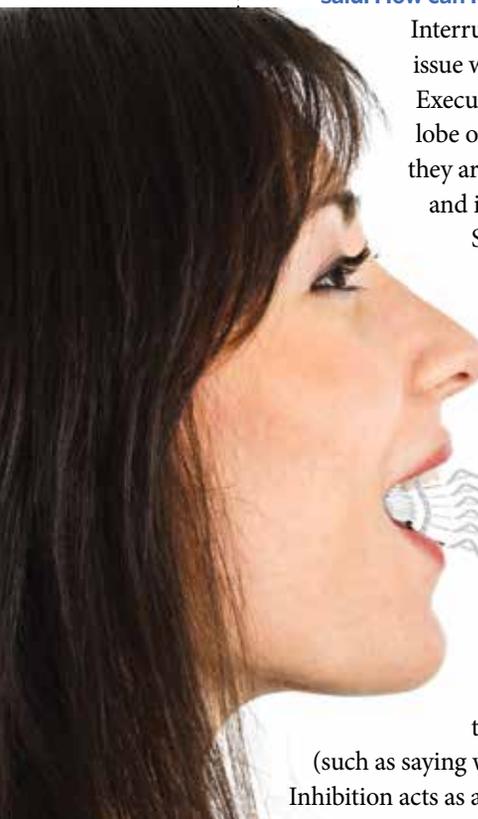
I've recently been diagnosed with ADHD and I'm feeling really lost. I currently see a therapist and have started medication, but I still feel isolated some days. I feel misunderstood, and now I'm hyperaware of my bad habits or ADHD symptoms. Now that I finally have answers, I thought things would start to get easier. So why am I still struggling?

It is a courageous first step to pursue diagnosis, and another significant step to begin medication. However, the ability to successfully manage ADHD emerges as you gradually come to understand your experience in a larger context. While you've begun to learn about ADHD, it takes time to appreciate the complex ways in which your unique brain responds and affects your behavior. It's also important to educate those closest to you, since ADHD affects your relationships, and learning to communicate about those issues is yet another part of the journey.

Those who have lived the majority of their lives undiagnosed develop a working explanation for their difficulties that is heavy on self-blame. Most have learned to compensate, but their adaptations come at the high cost of anxiety, depression, shame, isolation, and low self-esteem. Your growing awareness will help you accept your differences and redefine your priorities. Then, you can reframe your goals by balancing your needs with the expectations of society.

Transforming your worldview takes time and energy, but is well worth the investment in a healthy future. Over time, you'll find yourself advocating more and apologizing less; instead of feeling misunderstood, you'll come to view yourself with compassion and confidence.

Ellen Littman, PhD | Clinical Psychologist | Coauthor, *Understanding Girls and Women with ADHD* (2015)



I tend to bring snacks into my bedroom, eat them, and then forget about the containers or dishes. Today I found some bowls, spoons, an empty ice cream container, and countless candy wrappers under my bed. Some have clearly been there for a while. How do I make this bad habit stop?

The simplest solution would be to not bring food up into your room, if you tend to forget about the dishes afterwards. But it doesn't sound like the problem here is that you're eating in your bedroom, as much as that you're forgetting about the dishes afterwards. Therefore, my main advice to you is to be sure to put the dishes easily within sight and preferably within your path to the door.

Normally, my advice for remembering to bring things with you is to make it so that you literally have to trip over them on your way out. In this case, I don't want you hurting yourself on your way to the bathroom in the middle of the night, so you may want to move them out of your direct path. Either way, make sure they are extremely visible and hard to not see.

This assumes, of course, that you don't have too many other things on the floor or on your side table, causing the dishes to get swallowed up by the clutter and disappear. If so, you may need to address this bigger problem by keeping your room at least organized enough. Then, you may have to push yourself to take them with you each morning, rather than ignoring them.

Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA | Psychologist | Author, *Understand Your Brain, Get More Done* (2012) and *More Attention, Less Deficit* (2009) 

**Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA**, is a psychologist, author, and speaker. He serves as a member of CHADD's board of directors and co-chair of its conference committee.

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