

ADHD Life Is Exhausting

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ADULT ADHD?

Email them to attention@chadd.org and highly qualified experts will respond.

Why am I constantly exhausted?

Indeed, whether you're hyperactive or not, living with ADHD is exhausting!

Managing ADHD is a moment-by-moment struggle between you and your brain—and the winner gets to control your behavior. For example, you remember that you should pay the bills. But your brain says “No way—that task is unstimulating and I refuse to focus on it. Find me some high stimulation and I'll attend to that.” The reality is that you're in continuous negotiation with your brain—cajoling it to engage with necessary low stimulation tasks, while scanning your environment for higher stimulation that might increase the level of arousal.

While non-ADHD brains can more easily sustain focus whether underaroused or overaroused, ADHD brains are hypersensitive to stimulation levels and require more oversight. As a result, your necessary but sometimes impossible mission is to wade through the overwhelming flood of stimuli in order to find a workable balance between goals and impulses. And it's often slow going.

Reliable self-monitoring depends upon well-choreographed executive functions that elude most ADHD brains. Instead, your brain relies upon constant hypervigilance, fueled by intense anxiety. And, if that emotional cost is not high enough, there are still frantic

overcorrections and punitive self-criticisms. Regardless of how successfully you compensate, the relentless hidden maintenance required for self-regulation is extraordinarily challenging, burdensome, and exhausting. This is why good systems are so important for those with ADHD—they may not always be fun, but they do make it easier to make that right choice in the moment.

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

Now that I am out of college and living on my own, it feels like my ADHD has gotten worse. Has it?

Good news! No, it hasn't gotten “worse.” I tend to avoid qualitative judgments like “better” or “worse” and stick to the quantitative. My first two years out of college saw a spike in ADHD tendencies and this, I believe, is directly related to an immediate lack in formal structure once one graduates. The same is true for those graduating high school and deciding to join the work force straight away.

Organization and some form of structure are paramount post-graduation. I suggest starting in the bedroom or home office. Get a planner that you can physically write in. Write out your to-do Lists, daily or otherwise, and cross off tasks as you complete them. Take

a note from Eric Tivers: Clocks are your best friends. Hang a BIG calendar next to a BIGGER clock on your favorite wall and make a habit of cross-referencing between the two.

Secondly, communicate! Ask your roommates, your siblings, your peers what THEY see. Talk to people about your ADHD. My roommates were classmates of mine, and they are always there to answer questions, give guidance, celebrate my successes, and pick me up when I fall. With them I feel comfortable enough to ask what my tendencies are and discuss what I might do to build better habits.

Finally, seek out some form of professional help whether it is a CBT practitioner, ADHD coach, mindfulness expert, psychiatrist, therapist, etc., and begin building that structure you'll excel in.


Stephen Tonti | Writer, director, public speaker

I know date nights are really important for a relationship, but how do we actually make it happen?

When something is a priority, you find the time. If you have younger children, have a trusted friend or family member watch

your kids, barter babysitting duties with other parents, or hire a babysitter. A “date night” doesn’t mean you need to spend three hours at a restaurant—in a pinch, even just having an hour to yourselves to watch a movie at home also qualifies. You don’t even need to spend a lot of money; there are many free community events to choose from.

Schedule date nights ahead of time, and make sure the date night is on both of your calendars. The goal of date night is just to have some time to yourselves, to refocus on each other. When you do manage to get out, don’t use the time to conduct business—like talking about bills, kids’ homework struggles, and so forth. Make it fun. And if your best-laid plans for a date get swamped by circumstances, then get it back on the calendar.

Stephanie Moulton Sarkis, PhD, NCC, LMHC | Counselor | Author, *10 Simple Solutions to Adult ADD: How to Overcome Chronic Distraction & Accomplish Your Goals* (2011) 

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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— Dr. Mary Rooney, Clinical Psychologist specializing in ADHD

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