

# Busting Boredom, Anxiety, and Side Effects

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ADULT ADHD?

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

**I'm an adult with ADHD in need of management strategies for lengthy awards or religious ceremonies, recitals, plays or amateur sports events. You know, the kind of social events when attendance is mandatory, required by family and friends! These events just aren't very interesting to me and I feel like I'm being held captive. What can I do?**

For someone with ADHD, boring situations can feel downright painful. Because people with ADHD have less dopamine, their ability to stay focused is neurologically dependent on the stimulation of an innate interest.

Boring, uninteresting events call for boredom buster strategies that create stimulation and foster an interest when it isn't innately there. The following are some tried-and-true boredom busters:

- **Isometric exercises.** Focus on tensing and relaxing different muscles.
- **Use your smartphone (with earbuds).** Play online games or listen to podcasts, music, or books on tape.
- **Get creative.** Use your imagination to create a story.

- **Move.** Get there early to get the best seat... the one that lets you stand or walk.
- **Make it a game.** Guess the shoes under the graduation gowns, listen for certain instruments in a concert, predict the score of the game and see if you are right.
- **Compromise.** Host a celebratory after-event activity in lieu of attending.
- **Carry finger fidgets.** Use a tool or toy to keep your hands busy.
- **Mindfulness.** Practice simply noticing the boredom experience.
- **Get involved.** Offer to help set up, videotape, pass out flyers or snacks, or be a greeter at events.

Managing boredom with boredom busting strategies makes it possible for us to participate in the richness of our lives.

Laurie Dupar, PMHNP, RN, PCC | Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner | Senior Certified ADHD Coach, Certified Mentor Coach | Founder, International ADHD Coach Training Center

**When doing a diagnostic evaluation, how do you sort out the effects of anxiety vs. ADHD-related executive functioning problems? Which do you treat first? Is it always clear what's causing what and does it matter?**

It can be a challenge to differentiate anxiety versus ADHD. Instead of trying to tease out what is what, we should first look at the big picture. How is the person functioning? What is his or her quality of life? What are his or her main concerns? Now look at primary and secondary anxiety. Primary anxiety is anxiety for which you inherited the genes—it has been there as long as the ADHD symptoms. A family history of anxiety is a tip-off that it is a primary cause. Secondary anxiety occurs when you're working five times as hard as everyone else and only getting half the work done, or getting in trouble socially for interrupting others. You develop anxiety because of ADHD symptoms. If you have secondary anxiety, when




you treat the ADHD symptoms, the anxiety symptoms may abate. With primary anxiety, you may need to treat both issues at once.

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

**I find that medication helps me manage my ADHD, but I don't like the side effects, even after working with my prescriber to find the best regimen. Is there anything I can do about this?**

Unfortunately, some people have trouble finding a medication that gives a good balance between desired effects and side effects. If you have worked with your doctor to try different doses of different medications and still can't find a great option, then you may be in that unlucky minority. If this is the case, then you may need to spend more time thinking about the balance between the positive effects and the side effects and whether it's worth it to you. Some things to consider would include how helpful the positive effects are compared to how you do without medication. If you really need that extra help, then it may be worth tolerating the side effects. For example, if you were on a performance plan at work, you may be more inclined to deal with the side effects compared to if you can manage well enough without medication. My advice to you is to think about not just the medication itself, but your life as a whole and make a fully considered decision.

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.

**It's opened up a whole new world to me.**

**It will change your life.**

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**I have so much more confidence about what I can accomplish.**

**My learning differences don't control me anymore. Now I'm in control.**

**I never dreamed I'd be going to college.**

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