

# Positive Features of ADHD

THIS RESEARCH UPDATE FOCUSES ON ONE overarching topic:  
potential positive and helpful features of ADHD.

## Are there positive aspects to having ADHD?

The first paper utilized qualitative interviews to explore and describe positive aspects of ADHD. Researchers interviewed six adult males with high-functioning ADHD (i.e., recently receiving an ADHD diagnosis and medication prescription while also being employed) by asking the following three questions: *What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of having ADHD? Please describe a time when you felt that your ADHD helped you to achieve something. What aspects of your ADHD would you miss if it went away?* The study used a “phenomenological thematic content analysis” approach, which is when common themes and trends emerging from the data are coded, as opposed to researchers preselecting content and themes to code for.

Researchers compared the emerging themes and subthemes from interviews with six core virtues considered to be good by most cultures throughout history (i.e., wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence). Two themes and six sub-themes emerging from the interviews were unique to general character virtues: cognitive dynamism and energy (themes) and divergent thinking, hyperfocus, nonconformist, adventurous, self-acceptance, and sublimation (sub-themes). For example, one participant quote demonstrating the cognitive dynamism theme and hyperfocus subtheme is: “I get this incredible intense concentration and that’s great for work.”

Researchers acknowledge several limitations to the study, such as the small

and all-male sample, but also note that their findings are similar to other studies of positive aspects associated with ADHD. Uncovering strengths in those with ADHD may inform resources and skills to help individuals compensate for ADHD-related difficulties and lead flourishing lives.

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Sedgwick J A, Merwood A, & Asherson P. (2018). The positive aspects of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: a qualitative investigation of successful adults with ADHD. *ADHD Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders*, 1-13.

## Can hyperactivity be helpful?

The second paper examines whether hyperactivity among children with ADHD may be *helpful*, rather than a potentially harmful behavior that impedes learning. Specifically, researchers tested whether excess hyperactivity is associated with improved cognitive performance.

Children aged 8-12 with ADHD and typically developing control children completed a working memory task. While they were completing the test, researchers coded moment-to-moment hyperactivity by recording when children were out of their seat or moved their foot, leg, nondominant hand, or their chair. As expected, children with ADHD moved considerably more than typically developing children and performed significantly worse on the working memory task.

When examining the effect of movement on working memory performance, researchers found that typically developing children performed significantly worse on the working memory task when



they moved more. For children with ADHD, however, the more they moved, the *better* they performed, although their performance never approached that of the typically developing group.

These findings suggest that hyperactivity in children with ADHD may be functional and helpful, and that classroom accommodations that allow for nondisruptive and focused movement (wobble seats and movement balls, for example) may be beneficial for children with ADHD.

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Sarver D E, Rapport M D, Kofler M J, Raiker J S, & Friedman L M (2015). Hyperactivity in attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): Impairing deficit or compensatory behavior? *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 43(7), 1219-1232. [A](#)

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**Lauren Haack, PhD**, is an assistant professor and attending psychologist in the department of psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco. Her research program and clinical practice focus on accessible and culturally attuned evidence-based services for vulnerable youth and families, with a particular specialty in ADHD services for children in Spanish-speaking, Latinx families.

**Lauren M. Friedman, PhD**, is a post-doctoral fellow in the department of psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco. Her research focuses on understanding the neurocognitive deficits associated with ADHD and relations with educational outcomes.