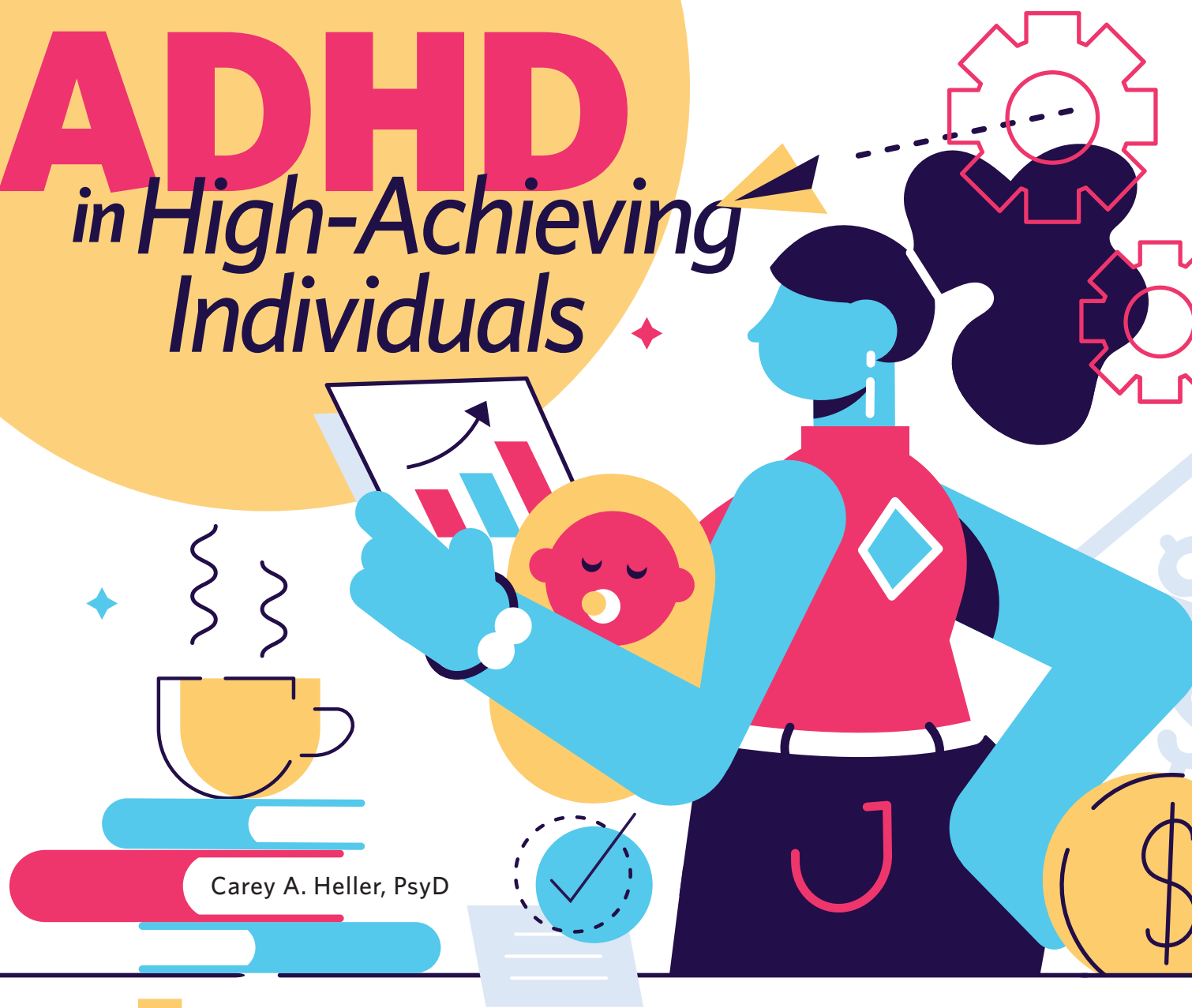


# ADHD

## *in High-Achieving Individuals*



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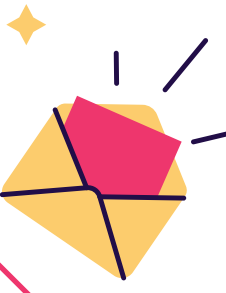
**J**AMIE IS A FORTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD COMPUTER PROGRAMMER. She has been working her way up in her company over the past eight years and is well regarded by her peers as being super-organized and very detail-oriented. What her colleagues do not see, though, is that she has ADHD and uses a variety of time-intensive task lists, project planning routines, and other items in order to excel at work. This helps her to be successful in her profession, but it is emotionally draining. Additionally, the strong mental energy exerted at work makes it harder for Jamie to cope as effectively with her ADHD symptoms in other domains—such as at home with her husband and children.

When we think about someone with ADHD, we expect them to have trouble paying attention, to be disorganized, to frequently fall behind on work tasks, and to always be playing catch up. While these common themes may hold true for many adults with ADHD, especially those whose symptoms are not effectively treated, this list does not capture the full spectrum of how people with ADHD experience it.

For those individuals with ADHD, especially adults, who on the surface may seem to have it together, the

emotional and physical toll taken by maintaining systems and strategies can be significant. Furthermore, although the person may appear free from observable symptoms to most others, including family members and close friends, they likely still observe their own deficits.


My primary goal in this article is to draw attention to those individuals with ADHD who seem to have it all together on the surface and outwardly do not appear to be hindered by their ADHD symptoms. In some cases,



this could be fully true. However, oftentimes even if the main ADHD symptoms are well treated and people are coping well, the emotional and physical fatigue and impact can take its toll. Furthermore, most people with ADHD as described above don't fit the common traits. Finally, because many of the resources, articles, programs, and so forth focus on people who are struggling much more, people with ADHD that is well-controlled sometimes feel more alone in their inner struggles.

Another goal is to help those individuals whose practical issues with attention, hyperactivity/impulsivity, and organization are reasonably well addressed, but who still struggle with other components, often secondary to the core ADHD symptoms. Through increased knowledge, and by using the strategies outlined below, high-achieving adults with ADHD (as well as their family members or friends) will be better able to get their needs fully met, to function optimally, and to get the most satisfaction out of life possible.

### **Five keys to better living with ADHD**



If you are one of those adults with ADHD who seem to be functioning well in some or most circumstances, what more could you do to improve things? Here are five key strategies you can use if you find yourself in a situation such as the one described above.

**1. Continue finding ways to improve symptoms through organizational and other systems that work for you, and improve the efficiency of these tools as feasible.** Continuing to identify needs to change and striving to improve likely has contributed to the success you have experienced thus far, and will keep pushing you forward toward doing better in the future.

**2. Practice acceptance toward areas of weakness and your need to use strategies that can be more time consuming.**

While one should keep trying to improve, it is also important to acknowledge shortcomings and the necessity of using in-depth tools to compensate. By accepting this and recognizing that it is a choice to use tools (for example: I could save time by not planning out my day, but then I'm choosing to be less organized and risk making big mistakes or being inefficient with my time), you can feel less burdened by the extra time it takes to get organized to complete tasks.

**3. If you feel bothered that you do so much behind the scenes that others don't know about—things that make you successful and mask your deficits—consider**

**thinking about why you'd like others to know all that you go through to accomplish things.**

Is it that you want others to know how hard you work? Is it about wanting others to know you have to put in far more time and effort than others to be as successful as you are? Does it bother you if people think your organizational skills, work ethic, or other good traits come naturally? Once you identify the reasons, decide if there are appropriate ways to subtly or explicitly convey these things to others. Related to this, it is very important that you have people you can rely on who you feel understand you and what you are going through. This may be family, friends, members of a support group, or other outlet.

**4. Work to improve your confidence.**

If you are someone with ADHD who struggled a lot with it in childhood but has finally gotten it together in adulthood, you may feel anxious that you are one misstep away from falling back into negative habits. Perhaps procrastination, zoning out, or other issues plagued your childhood and young adulthood. You might have developed poor self-confidence through making many mistakes in the past, but it's also likely that you have experiences of success. When you feel discouraged, think about recent or past situations where you have been successful and draw upon those instances when needed. Even better, write them down on a list, and refer to them as necessary to help bolster your confidence.

**5. Address co-occurring issues such as anxiety, depression, conflicts in your family relationships, parenting issues, and so forth.**

Operating successfully with minimizing the negative impact of ADHD symptoms is not done in isolation. Coexisting issues can impede anyone's optimal functioning. In addition to addressing ADHD symptoms, it is imperative to manage other issues that result separately or indirectly from ADHD issues. For instance, let's say your ADHD symptoms are straining your marriage. Even if you function well at work, that still doesn't fix things at home. Sometimes letting a partner know where you have trouble (remembering to pay bills, for example) and delegating those responsibilities can work well when feasible. In other instances, being more direct about how ADHD symptoms impact aspects of a relationship will be crucial for solving problems and fostering good communication. **A**



**Carey A. Heller, PsyD**, is a licensed psychologist based in Maryland. He specializes in the evaluation and treatment of ADHD and executive function issues. Learn more at [hellerpsychologygroup.com](http://hellerpsychologygroup.com). The coordinator for the Montgomery County chapter of CHADD, Dr. Heller also serves on the editorial advisory board for Attention magazine.