

Introduction

This book is for you if:

✓ You were diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as an adult.

or

✓ You were diagnosed as a child and still have symptoms.

or

✓ You think you might have ADHD because you have trouble ...

- ⇒ Concentrating
- ⇒ Paying attention
- ⇒ Getting organized
- ⇒ Planning
- ⇒ Problem solving
- ⇒ Controlling your emotions

This book can help you if:

- ✓ You want the scientific facts about what's wrong.
- ✓ You want to find the best treatment.

- ✓ You want to learn strategies and skills to overcome your symptoms.
- ✓ You want to know how to play up your strengths.

ADHD is real. And it's not a condition that affects only kids. I've spent more than 35 years treating, researching, and teaching others about ADHD. For most of those years, few people believed adults had ADHD. Now we know from closer study that as many as two-thirds of the children who have ADHD will still have it when they grow up. This means 4–5% of all adults have ADHD. **That's more than 11 million adults in the United States alone.**

If you're among them—or you think you might be—this book is for you. I wrote it because I think you should reap the benefit of everything we've learned from decades of research. ADHD is probably among the most extensively studied of all mental or emotional disorders. In fact, the information and advice in this book is based on *more than 7,000* research studies on this disorder that have been published over the last century.

We've arrived at a very good understanding of what ADHD is. We know a lot about how it affects the brain. We have a clearer view than ever of how and why the symptoms make your daily life seem like one long uphill climb.

Best of all, we have treatments that are so effective that many adults end up feeling as if the playing field has been leveled for them for the first time ever. You'll learn about them in the following pages. And based on a theory I've developed about the nature of ADHD, this book also offers you a collection of strategies that can turn your life around at work, at home, in college, and with your family and friends. These strategies are based on a scientific understanding of what's behind your symptoms, and they can help you be successful everywhere it's important to you. It's only what you deserve.

Step One

TO GET STARTED, GET EVALUATED

“Time escapes me, and I can’t deal with it effectively like other adults.”

“My mind and my life are a jumbled mess. I often can’t seem to organize my work or other activities anywhere near as well as the other adults I know.”

“I know that I flit from one thing to another and one project to another, and it drives the people I have to work with crazy. But I have to do things as soon as I think of them, because if I don’t, I’ll forget about them, and then they never get done.”

“As a kid, I was always the one who had a hard time sitting still and had all of this energy and no clue what to do with it. I always felt like an outcast, and I hated it. I remember having to go to the nurse’s office every day to take my meds—it was the worst feeling! No one wanted to be friends with me because I did not fit in with the group. I will never be the quiet, calm, reserved girl in the crowd. I am that outgoing, sometimes loud (OK, more often than I would like to admit), intense, somewhat nerdy, sarcastic, funny girl that suddenly everyone likes to be around.”

4 TO GET STARTED, GET EVALUATED

“So here is what happened last weekend that my wife is so upset about. I get out the lawn mower Saturday morning to cut the grass. But the gas can is empty. So I throw it in my Ford Explorer and drive down to the quickie mart for gas, and while I am filling up the can, a best friend pulls in to fill up. He’s as much an addict about trout fishing as I am. And he says he has an extra pole and waders, so why don’t we hit the stream for a little fishing. So I say ‘yeah’ and get into his car and leave mine at the gas station. We fish for an hour or so, and then we’re thirsty and hit this great little bar that guys love to hang out at and have a beer. It’s now three in the afternoon, and I finally get back to the gas station for my car, and the state police are there. You see, my wife called them when I didn’t return home after several hours from getting the gas for the mower, thinking something bad had happened to me. She was so furious with me when she found out what I had done that she wouldn’t talk to me for days! But that’s how I am—I just go with the flow of what’s happening around me and can’t remember what it was I was supposed to get done, or I just blow it off as less interesting than what I might have a chance to do.”

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1 Is It Possible That You Have ADHD?

Do the experiences you just read about sound familiar? These are the voices of adults with ADHD. The first comment strikes at the very heart of what ADHD is. It's a succinct description of the serious time management problems that ADHD creates for adults in their daily lives.

Do you feel like you're often out of sync with the clock, with schedules and agendas? Always late or scattered or unsure what to do with the limited hours in your day? If so, you know it's no fun feeling like you're constantly letting yourself and others down by missing deadlines and appearing to stand people up for dates and appointments. You know it's hard to maintain a sense of adult accomplishment and competence when those around you think they can't count on you to get things done. Maybe it's time to change all that.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PROBLEMS?

Of course time management troubles aren't caused only by ADHD. But if you share some of the other problems described by the people above, ADHD might be the culprit. And if it is, there's a lot you can do to change your life for the better.

Quickly run through this list and check off each question you'd answer with a "yes."

- Do you have trouble concentrating?
- Are you easily distracted?
- Do you consider yourself highly impulsive?
- Do you have trouble getting or staying organized?

6 TO GET STARTED, GET EVALUATED

- Do you find yourself unable to think clearly?
- Do you feel like you always have to be busy doing lots of things—but then you don't finish most of them?
- Do people say you talk too much?
- Is it hard for you to listen closely to others?
- Do you jump in and interrupt others when they're talking or doing something—and then wish you had thought first?
- Does your voice seem to carry over everyone else's?
- Do you struggle to get to the point of what you're trying to say?
- Do you often feel restless inside?
- Do you find yourself forgetting things that need to get done but are not urgent?

You'll find a list of 91 additional symptoms associated with ADHD, gathered from a study we did over 7 years, in the Appendix.

Only a professional evaluation can tell you for sure whether you have ADHD. But the more questions you answered “yes,” the more likely it is that you have this disorder. What I can tell you right now is that reams of scientific data show an association between complaints like these—and hundreds of similar ones—and ADHD in adults.

The data also tell us how severe the fallout can be. ADHD can make people spend their paycheck on something fun right now—and never save enough money for their monthly or annual bill payments or for that vacation or car or house they'll want even more tomorrow than the purchase that seemed irresistible today. It can make them bet it all on an investment that a little patience and research would have revealed as a bad risk. It can make you say and do all kinds of things you later regret. Sound familiar?

But, you might be thinking, I can't possibly have ADHD. I'm not hyperactive! My brother (or sister, nephew, childhood pal, classmate) had ADHD when we were kids, and he was constantly fidgety, restless, and “hyper,” always acting out in some embarrassing way. *I'm not like that.*



You don't have to be hyperactive to have adult ADHD.

One of the things we're beginning to understand well about adult ADHD is that hyperactivity *is* seen more in kids with the disorder—but then it usually declines substantially by adolescence and adulthood. Often the only thing



What we know about adults with ADHD comes straight from scientific fact:

- Data since 1991 from the University of Massachusetts Medical School, where one of the first clinics in the United States for adults with ADHD was established
- Evidence from a study of 158 children with ADHD (and 81 without it) followed into adulthood, one of the largest such studies ever done

that's left of hyperactivity in adults with ADHD is that feeling of restlessness and the need to keep busy that you may know well.

If you think you might have ADHD, there are good reasons to seek an evaluation:

- ✓ *We're coming up with lots of answers that could help you. Adult ADHD is becoming well understood by science even though the disorder hasn't been recognized in adults for that long.*
- ✓ *This disorder can hurt you more than a lot of other psychological problems—and it can hurt you every day, everywhere you go. ADHD is more limiting in more areas of adult life than most other disorders seen in outpatient mental health clinics.*
- ✓ *And there's a lot more help, in the form of effective treatment options and coping strategies, than for a lot of other disorders that affect adults. ADHD is one of the most treatable psychological disorders.*

HOW LONG HAVE YOU HAD THESE PROBLEMS?

If you think about how long you've been struggling to manage your time, to concentrate, and to control your impulses, would you say it's been just weeks or months or more like years? Picture yourself as a child: Were you dealing with any of the same problems then? Do you remember also having trouble sitting still in school? Finishing a hobby project? Following the rules on a playing field?

The adults with ADHD that I've studied, diagnosed, and treated have varying memories of the types of problems you checked off earlier. Many were not diagnosed as kids. Sometimes their pediatrician didn't believe ADHD was real. Or their parents didn't think "being hyper or not being able to focus was a reason to take a child to the doctor," as one man diagnosed in his mid-twenties reported. These people may have bought the myth that there was nothing wrong with them that sheer willpower wouldn't cure. Sometimes people end up undiagnosed because they fall into a gray area between ADHD and non-ADHD symptoms or because they had other problems that muddied the picture.

Going undiagnosed as a child doesn't mean you don't have ADHD.



Having sudden, short-term symptoms usually rules out ADHD.

Having less severe problems managing time, concentrating, and controlling impulses than you did as a child doesn't mean you don't have ADHD.

Being hyperactive as a child but not as an adult doesn't mean you don't have ADHD.

But not having *any* ADHD symptoms as a child probably *does* mean you don't have ADHD. ADHD-like symptoms that arose only in adulthood or that haven't been going on for very long are probably being caused by something else—a brain injury or other physical illness, for example.



Of all cases of ADHD we've diagnosed in our various clinics and studies, 98% started before age 16.

If you don't clearly remember having the same problems you just noted when you were a child, is there someone who knew you well then that you can ask? A parent? Brother or sister? Ironically, the same problems that make it hard for people with ADHD to get things done on time, make wise choices, and even get along with others can make it tough for them to trace their own history accurately—at least until they've reached approximately their mid- to late 20s. I'll explain why in Step Two.



I didn't have any problems as a child, and I haven't had any brain injuries. Isn't it possible that ADHD hasn't caused me any problems till now because of my intelligence? I scored high on IQ tests in elementary school.

Except in school and possibly at work, intelligence is unlikely to protect you from experiencing impairments. Intelligence is not the only factor involved in domains like family and social functioning, driving, crime and drug use, dating and marital relationships, and, in fact, most others. High intelligence wouldn't necessarily have protected you in these areas if you had ADHD symptoms. Sudden appearance of problems in adulthood is highly likely to be caused by something other than ADHD.



Children and teens with ADHD that I've followed up into adulthood often don't know the extent of their own symptoms or how much those symptoms are interfering with their life. **It's not until 27–32 years of age that adults with ADHD become more consistent in what they say about themselves relative to what others say about them.**



I think I may have ADHD now even though I didn't have any concentration or other problems when I was younger. Maybe I was just compensating for my ADHD in other ways?

In our research, the average number of major life activities in which adults with ADHD said they were often impaired was 6 or 7 out of 10. ADHD causes serious impairment across all the domains of adult life, from education to work to family. It would be nearly impossible to make it through childhood, adolescence, and even early adulthood by “compensating” somehow. Most professionals would have a hard time accepting the idea that ADHD had not interfered with a person's functioning until adulthood without strong evidence that parents and schools had made extraordinary efforts to help. ADHD is defined by *lack of* compensation during the childhood years—not by successful compensation during those years!



Symptoms must have lasted for at least 6 months to be considered in diagnosing ADHD.

WHAT ARE YOUR SYMPTOMS?

Only a qualified professional can help you fully answer that question. Still, checking off any of the following questions that you'd answer “yes” will help you figure out whether to pursue a diagnostic evaluation. In our research

10 TO GET STARTED, GET EVALUATED

aimed specifically at understanding adult ADHD, we've found the following nine criteria most accurate in identifying the disorder.

Do you often ...

- Easily get distracted by extraneous stimuli or irrelevant thoughts?
- Make decisions impulsively?
- Have difficulty stopping activities or behavior when you should do so?
- Start a project or task without reading or listening to directions carefully?
- Fail to follow through on promises or commitments you make to others?
- Have trouble doing things in their proper order or sequence?
- Drive much faster than others—or, if you don't drive, have difficulty engaging in leisure activities or doing fun things quietly?
- Have difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or recreational activities?
- Have difficulty organizing tasks and activities?



Information
on finding a
professional to
evaluate you is
in Chapter 3.



The fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV), published by the American Psychiatric Association, uses 18 symptoms to diagnose ADHD—9 focusing on inattention and 9 on hyperactivity–impulsivity. But that list (see the Appendix) was developed for use with children only. My associates and I have compiled research data showing that the list of 9 symptoms above is more useful with adults. A research colleague of mine, Stephen Faraone, PhD, has done an independent study with his own groups of adults showing that these symptoms were very good at identifying those having ADHD.

Did you check off four of the first seven symptoms on this list, or six of all nine symptoms? *If so, you are highly likely to have ADHD. In that case you should seek an evaluation from an experienced mental health professional if you have not done so already.*

HOW DO THESE SYMPTOMS AFFECT YOUR LIFE?

ADHD is not a category that you either fall into or don't. It is not like pregnancy. It's more like human height or intelligence. Think of it as a dimension, with different people falling at different points along it.

So where on that dimension is the division between "disorder" and "no disorder"? It's where impairment in a major life activity occurs. *Symptoms* are the ways a disorder expresses itself in thoughts and actions. *Impairments* are the adverse consequences that result from showing those symptoms. The table below lists typical impairments caused by ADHD in childhood and beyond.

 Step Five gives specific strategies for preventing ADHD symptoms from causing the impairments listed in the table.

Typical childhood impairments	Typical adolescent and adult impairments
Family stress and conflict	Poor functioning at work
Poor peer relationships	Frequent job changes
Few or no close friendships	Risky sexual behavior/increased teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases
Disruptive behavior in stores, church, and other community settings to the extent that you are asked to leave or not return	Unsafe driving (speeding, frequent accidents)
Low regard for personal safety/increased accidental injuries	Difficulties managing finances (impulsive spending, excessive use of credit cards, poor debt repayment, little or no savings, etc.)
Slow development of self-care	Problems in dating or marital relationships

(cont.)

Typical childhood impairments	Typical adolescent and adult impairments
<p>Slow development of personal responsibility</p> <p>Significantly lower than average school performance</p> <p>Significantly fewer years of schooling</p>	<p><i>Less common but notable:</i></p> <p>Antisocial activities (lying, stealing, fighting) that lead to frequent police contact, arrests, and even time in jail; often associated with a greater risk for illegal drug use and abuse</p> <p>Generally less healthy lifestyle (less exercise; more sedentary self-entertainment, such as video games, TV, surfing the Internet; obesity, binge eating or bulimia, poorer nutrition; greater use of nicotine and alcohol), and consequently an increased risk for coronary heart disease</p>

WHAT'S NEXT?

Now you should have a fairly good idea of whether you might have ADHD and should consider a professional evaluation:

- Do you have at least four to six of the nine symptoms now?
- Do they occur often in your current life?
- Have you been having these troubles for at least 6 months?
- Did they develop in childhood or adolescence (before 16 years of age)?
- Have your current symptoms resulted in adverse consequences (impairment) in one or more major domains (education, work, social relationships, dating or marital relationships, managing your money, driving, etc.)?
- Did you experience adverse consequences from these symptoms in childhood?

If you can answer “yes” to all of these questions, there is a high probability that you have ADHD. Read on to find out what you can do about it.