

Treatment for ADHD

ADD is like having a powerful race car for a brain, but with bicycle brakes. Treating ADD is like strengthening your brakes—so you start to win races in your life.

- Dr. Ed Hallowell

Publishing Info

Published and created by:

Marla Cummins - Cummins Coaching and Training - www.marlacummins.com

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Cummins Coaching and Training

www.marlacummins.com

marla@marlacummins.com

617-325-3512

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Welcome

Want to work with your ADHD, and not against it?

It is true that ADHD is not something you can get rid of. It is part of you, including all the positive and challenging aspects that come with it.

If you are reading this, it is likely that your ADHD presents you with challenges in one way or another. Though medication is often the cornerstone of a treatment plan for ADHD, maybe you are wondering how you can treat your ADHD beyond just medication.

I bet you have already googled ADHD treatment, and you likely ended up with an overwhelming amount of information. You might even have wondered how you could possibly sort through the credible options from the more specious ones.

My **objectives** for this workbook are to help you by:

- giving you an overview of possible treatment options to help you think about how you want to treat your ADHD.
- providing you with a process for sorting through your options and making sound decisions about how you want to treat your ADHD.

It is important to note that this workbook is not intended to be comprehensive in scope or depth. Nor is it intended to take the place of medical advice from your doctor.

It is a **starting point**.

My **goal** is that this information will help you as you craft a holistic treatment plan that provided the support you need to work with your ADHD.

The **options** I will cover fall under one or more of the categories below.

- Medication - covered this in an earlier module.
- Psychosocial Treatments - Includes therapy, support groups and coaching
- Complementary Treatments
- Alternative Treatment is any treatment - other than prescription medication or standard psychosocial/behavioral treatments - that claims to treat the symptoms of ADHD with an equally or more effective outcome.

Since there is no one treatment that will provide a “fix” for your ADHD, you will need to decide what combination of options will help you to operate most effectively in order to reach your goals.

And the process of doing this will entail a certain degree of trial and error, as you experiment to find the right treatment plan.

Of course, you should **consult with your doctor** when considering your options and before starting and treatment.

Where Am I Now?

To help you get jump started on thinking about the topic of ADHD Treatment, answer the question below.

1. First, answer yes or no for the following questions.

I understand all of my treatment options. Yes / No

I am satisfied with how I am currently treating my ADHD. Yes / No

I have concerns about my treatment. Yes / No

I have questions about my treatment options. Yes / No

2. I am currently treating / managing my ADHD by... (Describe how you are treating your ADHD.)

3. The questions I have about my current treatment and / or options are:

Medication

Preview

Making the decision to take ADHD medication can be hard, as there is so much, sometimes conflicting, information out there. Whether you decide to take medication or not, my hope is that you make an informed decision based on accurate information.

The questions, brief content overview and resource recommendations below will help you on your journey to making the best decision for yourself.

Current Understanding

Taking a brief inventory of your current knowledge and questions about ADHD medication can help you decide if you need more information or help in making a decision regarding medication.

Below are a few questions to help get you started.

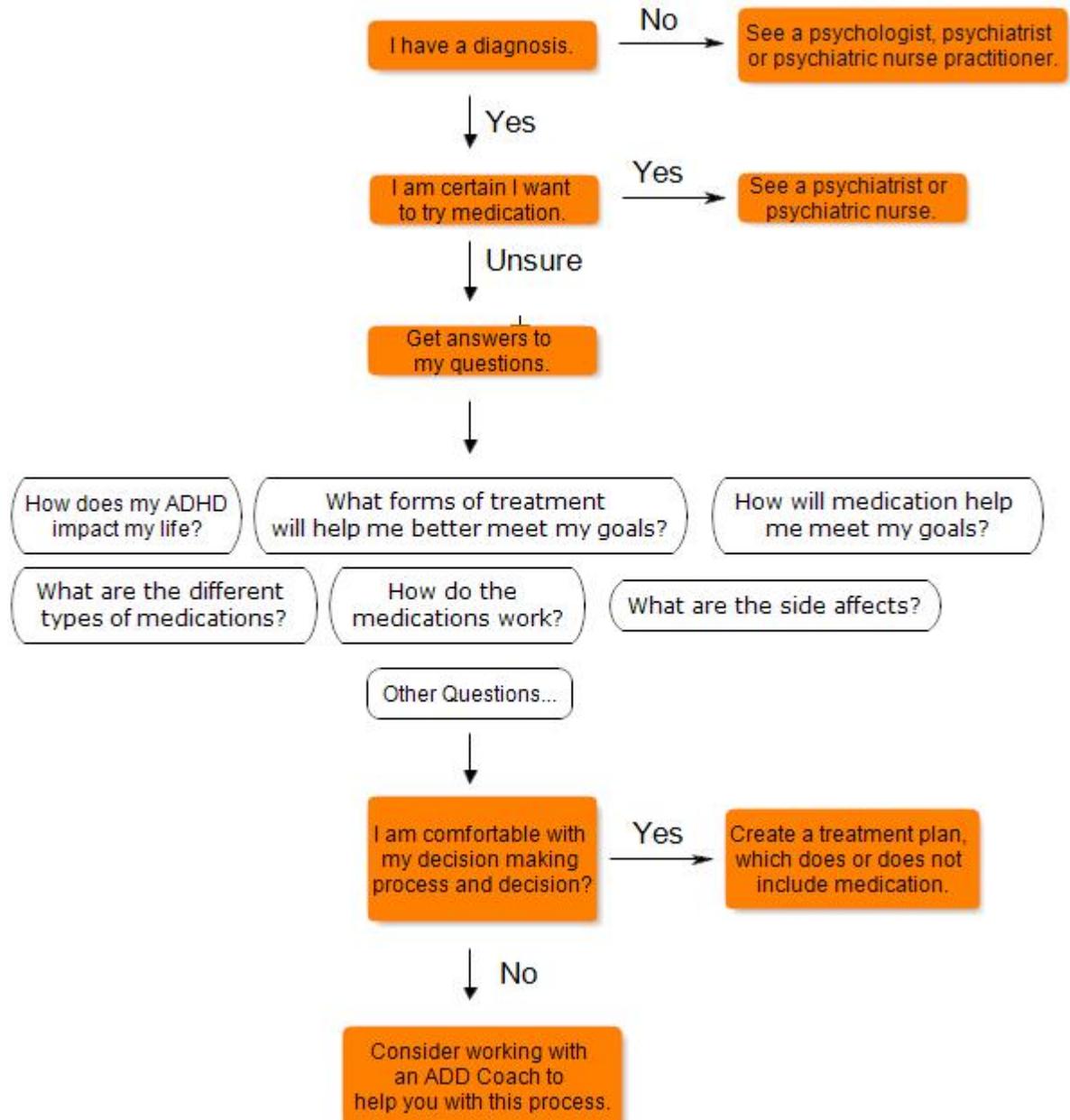
1. Medication to treat ADHD can or does (if you are currently taking it) help me in the following ways:

2. I have the following questions or concerns regarding ADHD medication:

3. The following are the resources (people, books, internet...) I can use to find out answers to my questions:

Decision Making Process

By using the step by step process below you can **minimize the confusion and overwhelm** you may feel when attempting to arrive at a decision that works for you. Though, admittedly, the process may feel lengthy, you will ultimately arrive at a more satisfactory answer if you take your time and do not rush.



Diagnosis

For an **evaluation**, it is best to see a **psychologist, psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner**.

These professionals are trained in the field and are the most qualified to make a diagnosis. The advantage of seeing a psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner for evaluation is that they can also prescribe medication, if a need is indicated by the evaluation.

If you have not yet received a diagnosis from a psychologist, psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner, I would suggest going back one step before considering taking ADHD medication.

You may be tempted to consult with your family doctor, as the process can seem easier and quicker. And some family doctors may be willing to diagnose and prescribe medication for mental health issues.

But I strongly caution against seeing your family doctor for advice or evaluation for any suspected mental health issue, including ADHD. They likely do not have the necessary specialized knowledge and also do not keep current in the field.

This lack of expertise can result in delays in receiving the correct diagnosis and treatment plan for ADHD or any other mental health issue. Consequently, the process may be longer and your ability to move effectively and efficiently toward your goals may be severely compromised.

However, your family doctor may be able to help you by making an appropriate referral.

Knowing Your Objective

Once you receive the diagnosis and are ready to explore treatment options to manage your ADHD, you have many decisions to make. One decision is whether to take medication or not. It is not an easy decision, and there is no right or wrong answer.

Knowing what you **hope to achieve** by taking medication is the first step in the process.

Take a minute to answer the following questions to gain some clarity about this. (If you find it difficult to answer any of the questions, that is likely an indication that you need to do more research or the help of a professional to answer your questions.)

1. I think taking medication will help me in the following ways:

2. I'm not exactly sure how medication will help me, and need to find more answers by accessing the following resources (professionals, books, internet):

3. If I decide to take medication, I think I will also need to make the following types of changes and use the following types of support to achieve the results I want:

Stimulant Medication Overview

Stimulant medication, while not the only type of medication used to treat ADHD, is the **most common type**.

As Dr. Russell Barkley notes,

“... among the treatments that results in the greatest degree of improvement in the symptoms of the disorder, research overwhelmingly supports the use of the stimulant medications for this disorder.”¹

And for the 70% - 80% of adults with ADHD for whom stimulant medication is affective, the main benefit is that it serves to **correct a biochemical condition in the brain that interferes with attention and impulse control**. Simply, stimulants serve to allow for adequate amounts of the necessary neurotransmitters, particularly dopamine and norepinephrine.

While the medication is active in your system it may help by minimizing the impact of your ADHD symptoms, even though the symptoms remain. That is, medication can help you:

- be better able to more consistently use the skills and strategies you already know.
- make choices in the moment that are more in sync with your values and long term goals.
- be better able to learn new skills, strategies and information related to your various professional and personal goals.

As Dr. Thomas Brown, author of *Attention Deficit Disorder: The Unfocused Mind in Children and Adults*, explains:

“...increased dopamine in the synapse can act almost as a kind of ‘Viagra’ to encourage the brain’s response to the task. Thus [stimulants] may counter the chronic problem with motivating oneself to do necessary, but not intrinsically interesting tasks.”

If you are not living up to your potential and you would like to operate more effectively in the various domains of your life, then medication may be an option for you.

Yet, while medication can form the **cornerstone of an effective treatment plan** for many with ADHD, some may eschew it because of what they have heard in the media or from friends and family members.

How Do I Feel About ADHD Medication?

No doubt, using medication to treat ADHD has gotten a bad rap. And I bet your decision to take medication or not may be affected by some of this hearsay, like the comments below.

- *People – kids – are over medicated.*
- *They just want to take the easy way out; they just need to try harder.*
- *Everyone has ADD, should they all take drugs?*
- *If only they ate better and had less sugar in their diet.*

Your opinion about ADHD medication, whether based on fact or not, will likely impact your decisions around medication.

Take a minute to be clear about your perspective by answering the following questions.

1. When I think about ADHD medication, the following beliefs comes to mind:

2. If I took ADHD medication, I might feel (describe how you might feel about yourself):

3. I think the following aspects of my opinion are possibly based on hearsay (I need to confirm or debunk them):

4. I think the following aspects of my opinion are based on accurate information:

Remember, ADHD is a neurological condition in which you lack a sufficient amount of certain neurotransmitters. Simply put, medication just fills in the gaps and levels the playing field.

Really, taking medication for ADHD is no different than taking insulin for diabetes or wearing glasses for poor eye sight.

If you don't think you have accurate or enough information about ADHD and / or ADHD medication to make an informed decision, I would encourage you to **explore** some of the recommended **resources** at the end of the module, as well as **speak to professionals** whom you trust.

But, please don't base your decision on what you hear in the general media or from your cousin Tillie.

If You Decide to Take Medication...

It is important, if you decide to take medication, that you do so under the **guidance of a prescriber**, who has expertise in ADHD medication, such as a psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner.

As with the evaluation needed to diagnose ADHD, the understanding needed to prescribe the right medication to treat ADHD is far too complex for a generalist, like your family doctor.

As I noted before, this process may be lengthy. It may take time to find the right prescriber. And once you find the right prescriber, determining the right medication for you may entail some degree of trial and error.

So, you may find yourself questioning whether it is worth the time and effort.

If you find yourself wavering, answer the following questions to see if you want to continue trying.

1. If I decide not to take medication, are other forms of treatment for my ADHD sufficient to help me reach my goals? What are they?

2. If other forms of treatment are not sufficient, how might medication help me?

3. Knowing that figuring out the right medication might take not be quick, how much time and effort am I willing to commit to the process? Be specific.

When You First Take Medication

When you first get your prescription it is important to have a specific **plan** in place for **follow-up** with your prescriber in order to monitor the effectiveness and possible side effects of the medicine.

It is often the case with ADHD medication that you will need to adjust the dosage and possibly the type of medication before you have the right one. For these reasons, be sure that you and your prescribing practitioner have agreed on a follow up plan.

So that you can work with your prescriber in adjusting your medication in the beginning, it is helpful to use a medication log. If your prescriber does not give you one, you can access two different types by following these links: [Daily Medication Log](#), [Weekly Medication Log](#). Both will be helpful, so choose whichever one you prefer.

Need More Information

While the above information gave you a taste of some of the issues you may encounter as you make your decision regarding medication, you likely will want more information.

In addition to your doctor, the resources below, which are both **reputable** and **accessible**, are great places to get started.

Attitude Mag - [ADHD Medication & Treatment Information](#)

National Resource Center on ADHD (A Program of CHADD) - [Medication Management](#)

The Limits of Medication

Yes, this module is about medication.

But it would not be complete without acknowledging that using medication as the only form of treatment for your ADHD is not sufficient by itself to address the challenges of ADHD.

In fact, it may not be effective, if it is the only intervention. Medication cannot teach skills and strategies, heal past hurts from the impact of ADHD or offer support and accountability.

While medication may form the cornerstone of your treatment plan, it is usually most effective when it is **part of a holistic treatment plan**, which may also include:

- skill building around areas, such as time and task management
- education about ADHD and its impact
- awareness and use of strengths
- exercise
- proper diet
- enough sleep
- quality connections with others
- a mindfulness practice
- therapy
- ADD Coaching
- tools
- other forms of treatment

So, if you decide to take medication to manage your ADHD, you will still need to incorporate other forms of treatment, as well.

Conclusion

The decision to take medication is a very personal one, and there is no right or wrong answer.

I hope that you will stick with the process until you arrive at an answer that feels right for you.

Therapy and ADD Coaching

Overview

While medication is helpful, it cannot teach you skills or give you insight into your emotional life.

Certainly, you may be able to do some of this on your own through books and internet resources. They are good places to start for many.

But it can help to have someone outside yourself, a professional, to assist you. Therapist and ADD Coaches can support you in your journey to work with your ADHD.

J. Russell Ramsay, PhD, co-director of the University of Pennsylvania's Adult ADHD Treatment and Research Program posits that:

“...with the ADHD medication as a foundation, it's the psychosocial treatments that can come in and finish the job.”

However, like many adults with ADHD, you may feel the shame of years of failed accomplishments as a result of living with undiagnosed ADHD, and may be reticent to ask for help. You may even have come to believe that you are not capable of reaching your goal(s) and are ready to give up.

Wherever you are in thinking about or attempting your goals, you **don't need do it alone.**

With help you can reach your potential. Therapy and ADD Coaching are two types of Psychosocial Treatments that can provide the support that you need.

And, in order to decide which type of support is most appropriate for you right now, it is important to understand the key differences between therapy and coaching.

ADD Coaching

In general, ADD Coaching deals more from a **present** and **future oriented** perspective.

Many adults with ADHD know what they need to do to reach their goals. The difficulty lies in following through on what they know. If this rings true for you, an ADD Coach can provide the education, support and accountability you need to reach your goals.

More specifically, an ADD Coach can help you in the following ways:

Clarification

Like many adults with ADHD, you may spend endless hours in your thoughts, not knowing how to make the next step or, perhaps, not even knowing what the next step should be. You say things to yourself like,

- “I need to get more organized.”
- “Something has to change because this job is driving me crazy!”
- “I want to get more done around the house.”
- “I should get a handle on my finances.”

But this may be as far as you have gotten. And so you feel overwhelmed by your thoughts, and like you don't have control over your life.

By working with an ADD Coach you can get out of your head and clarify:

- what is within your control to make your situation better.
- how making a particular change supports your values and goals.
- what changes you are realistically willing and able to make.
- what your end goal looks like in measureable and concrete terms and how to get there.
- what kind of support you need to make the changes you want.
- and more...

Once you have more clarification, you certainly will feel more confident that you can be in charge of your life. And you will feel relief as you realize that you can reach your goals in a way that works with your ADHD.

Learning About ADHD

Understanding the impact of your ADHD and how to manage it is another critical piece of the puzzle in helping you successfully reach your goals.

And by the time you consider working with an ADD Coach, you may have learned quite a bit about ADHD through books and online resources. An ADD Coach can help you expand on your current learning and apply the information to your unique situation. As you do this, you will be in a better position to answer such questions as:

- What professional and personal environments would be a good fit for me?
- What new strategies and skills do I want to learn in order to be more effective, and how I successfully adopt them?
- In what contexts are my ADHD traits strengths, and how can I use them to support my efforts?
- How can I identify and drop or delegate tasks that are challenging for me because they require skills I have no interest in building?
- How else could learning more about my particular ADHD help me?

Answering these questions will help you take the next step of creating an environment that works for you.

Creating a Supportive Environment

It feels good to work hard when you are working toward a goal you really want, right? And breaking out in a sweat now and then is ok, but you don't want to get hurt and pull a muscle!

Working with an ADD Coach you can decide how to [upgrade your environment](#) so you can reach your goals while exerting less effort. While you will design your environment in a way that will best support you, you certainly can't do this all at once.

So, with the help of your coach, you can choose those aspects of your environment that, if you made changes, would give you the greatest leverage. For more on this, check out "[Creating a Supportive Environment](#)."

Understanding and Compassion

But you may think that what you really need is a “swift kick in the tush” to get you motivated. This thinking is likely due to a long history of people, including parents, teachers and bosses, telling you, “just work harder!”

So you may have come to believe that since you can't seem to work harder on your own, an ADD coach is just the ticket. But, if you are looking for an ADD Coach, my guess is that being told by others to work harder has not worked for you so far. And having a coach push you is not going to help, either.

Rather, an ADD Coach will demonstrate understanding and compassion in their coaching, and assist you in building understanding and compassion for yourself.

Don't worry, this is not the same as letting you off the hook for not following through on your intentions! It means recognizing and pointing out how your ADHD symptoms are getting in your way. And then creatively figuring out how you can work with your ADHD and follow through in order to reach your goals.

Support

One result of this understanding and compassion is that an ADD Coach offers a great deal of support, commensurate with your needs and wants.

In terms of frequency of contact, an ADD Coach typically offers daily emailing and short calls in between sessions to provide support and accountability. While the amount of contact is up to you, it is available in recognition that following through on intentions and making changes is a challenge.

The degree to which a coach will be involved in helping you learn new skills and strategies is also dependent on your needs and desires. With the help of your coach, you might:

- learn in real time how to most efficiently use your task manager, process your email, etc. (I do this by screen sharing with clients.)
- design the exact steps you will take to complete a project.
- prepare and practice a conversation you want to have with a colleague, as you enhance your communication skills.
- decide what strategies you can use to reduce your impulsivity in specific contexts.
- figure out your priorities, what to keep on your plate and what to take off or defer.
- strategize how to solve a particularly vexing problem.

Especially in the beginning, as you are first learning and making changes, hopefully you will feel comfortable leaning into your coach for more support.

Are You Ready For Coaching?

In order to fully benefit from coaching you want to make sure that you are in the right place in your life.

Taking this [ADHD Coaching Readiness](#) assessment will give you an idea of whether this is the right time for you to take advantage of the benefits of coaching.

If you determine that you are not ready for ADD Coaching, you may decide to "shore up your foundation" by working with a therapist first. You can always revisit the idea of engaging the support of an ADD Coach.

Therapy

Generally speaking, therapy can help you **uncover** and **heal** from destructive thought patterns, behaviors and painful beliefs in order to help you operate better in your daily living.

For example, you may have regrets about your past and wonder what might have been if you had known about your ADHD sooner in life. Perhaps, you are still suffering from past (or present) ridicule or criticism as a result of your ADHD, and have come to believe that you are just not capable of succeeding.

These issues, if not addressed, can impact your ability to effectively take the necessary actions to reach your goals.

In order to create a better future for yourself, you need to be in a place where you accept your ADHD diagnosis and can commit to working with your ADHD without self-recrimination.

If psychological concerns, like the above examples, are keeping you stuck, you may need to work through some of these with a therapist before or concurrent with a more action oriented approach, like working with an ADHD Coach.

Therapists Who Understand Adult ADHD

Kathleen G. Nadeau, Ph.D., a prominent authority on ADHD notes:

For psychotherapy to be effective in treating adults with ADD (ADHD), the therapist must take an approach that keeps in mind the neurological aspects of ADD (ADHD) as well as the psychological issues that develop from a lifetime of being impacted by ADD (ADHD).

Too often, the adult with ADD (ADHD) receives therapy from clinicians who are trained to psychologically "interpret" all behavior. Therapists with psychodynamic training may view an individual's chronic lateness as "resistance" to therapy rather than considering the possibility that this pattern is related to an ADD (ADHD) time-management problem that needs to be directly addressed on more practical terms.

So, while there are many options for therapy, it is critical to work with someone who has a solid understanding of how to work effectively with adults with ADHD. When interviewing therapists, ask questions, such as:

- How much experience do you have working with clients with ADHD?
- What is your professional / educational background in ADHD?
- What is your approach in working with clients who have ADHD?
- Specifically, what is your approach in helping clients with ADHD meet their goals
- What is your philosophy of ADHD medication?

Working with a therapist who does not have a solid understanding of ADHD can really leave you feeling misunderstood, and obviously will not help you move forward. Over the years I have worked with many clients who have shared with me their experience of working with therapists. Many have found therapists who were a great fit, and helped my clients get to place of acceptance and readiness to move forward.

However, some of my clients encountered therapists who because of their inexperience with ADHD:

- did not have realistic expectations of what they could accomplish in a particular time frame and pushed too hard.
- were confused about their lack of follow-through and seemed unsure of how to help them.
- treated them like they were their ADHD instead of treating them as whole person.
- did not believe ADHD existed in adults. (As I write this in 2013, I still hear this from clients, really.)

So, please do take the time you need to find a therapist who understands ADHD in adults. The process may be longer, but it will be worth it in end.

Therapy Approaches

In addition to finding a therapist who understands ADHD, you will also need to decide which therapy approach is right for you.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which focuses on changing specific thinking and behavior patterns has been shown to be one of the most effective forms of therapy for adults with ADHD.

You can find a good introduction to CBT as an approach for ADHD in this article by Carl Sherman, Ph.D., [How Cognitive Behavior Therapy Can Stop Negativity](#).

Therapy and / or Coaching?

So, how do you decide whether to work with a therapist or an ADD Coach?

Many adults with ADHD, including many of my clients, work with both a therapist and an ADD Coach. While you may work on some of the same issues with both a therapist and an ADD Coach, the following is the simplest way to differentiate between the two.

Though many therapists can be very "coach-like," a therapist will generally work with you on your psychological issues.

While dealing with feelings will certainly be part of the coaching process, an ADD Coach will focus more on supporting you in taking concrete actions toward your goals.

You may decide to work with both at the same time. While an ADD Coach helps you to take concrete steps forward, you can continue to get the support of a therapist to help you with your ongoing psychological issues.

If you decide to work with both, it is helpful to ask your therapist and coach to talk to each other on occasion. I have found this collaborative effort to be very helpful in supporting my clients, who are also working with a therapist.

Summary

It takes **time** and **effort** to get the **right support**. But once you get the right people on your team, they will be your "go to people" for learning, support, accountability and resources.

You no longer will feel like you are swimming alone.

Complementary & Alternative Treatment

Overview

[Medication](#) might be the first thing that comes to mind when you think about standard treatment for ADHD. You might also think of [therapy and ADHD Coaching](#) as means of treatment.

True, these are the standard methods of treatment, and the only ones that are fully supported by scientific research as effective treatments in the long term. And for many with ADHD these form the foundation of their treatment plan.

However, if you consider treatment as a means of reducing the ADHD symptoms that cause you to struggle in your daily life, the options available become more plentiful.

You might even be surprised at some of the options I've included below. While others may appear to just be common sense.

I certainly encourage you to explore the many different ways of managing your ADHD. At the same time you should also exercise caution, and carefully research your options and, of course, consult with your doctor before choosing a course of action.

Using Your Strengths

When exploring treatment options, I think the first step should be **being aware** of and **developing** your **strengths**.

While not necessarily a means of reducing your symptoms, operating from your strengths allows you avoid having to compensate for your weaknesses, which include the ADHD symptoms that you find challenging.

As Drs Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey, authors of *Driven to Distraction* and *Delivered from Distraction* point out:

The best way to change a life of frustration into a life of mastery is by developing talents and strengths not just shoring up weaknesses.

Positive psychology researcher Alex Linley, author of *Average to A+ Realising Strengths in Yourself and Others*, describes a strength as:

...a pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energising to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development, and performance.

Relying more on your strengths then becomes part of treating your ADHD!

Once you identify your assets, you can focus on understanding how you can use these skills to help you accomplish your current goal(s).

Answering the question below can help you to get started.

1. To start with the most obvious, what are your strengths? This is not a time to be modest!

2. What activities capture your attention and keep you consistently engaged? What are your strengths related to these activities?

3. What are your passions? What are your strengths related to these passions?

4. What types of tasks do you learn and understand quickly, and approach the challenge with a sense of joy? Again, what are your strengths related to these tasks?

5. When are you most effective and efficient? What strengths are you using during these times?

If you are not able to answer the above questions on your own, ask one of your “fans,” such as a friend or family member, to help you. A professional, such as a coach or therapist can also help you in this endeavor.

There are also many assessments available to help you find out more about your strengths.

If you are interested in finding out more about your career related strengths, I would recommend trying [Now, Discover Your Strengths](#) or [Strengths Finder 2.0](#).

Another interesting test is the [The VIA Survey of Character](#), if you want to find out more about your character strengths.

However you decide to explore your strengths, remember that they are not fixed. Once you have an understanding of your strengths, you can choose to develop and utilize those specific strengths that you think will be most useful to you.

Exercise

Of particular interest to those with ADHD is that exercising leads to an immediate increase in the levels of the neurotransmitters, dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin.

Thus, in the short term, **exercise** can have the same effect as the various stimulant medications, like Adderall and Ritalin, resulting in a temporary **improvement in attention and mood**.

Exercise also helps to wake up the executive function component of the frontal cortex, which is under stimulated in those with ADHD. With this improved functioning, there is the potential for better decision making. You may find that you are able to slow down, evaluate your options and make better choices.

With an increased capacity to slow down, you can also curb your impulsivity and need for immediate gratification, both common ADHD symptoms. Being able to curb these symptoms gives you even more opportunities to make choices that work for you.

You probably already recognize that exercise is good for you, generally, and an important part of a holistic treatment plan for ADHD. But building an exercise habit can also be quite challenging.

In the rest of this section, I'll review some of the typical challenges in creating an exercise habit, as well as suggested workarounds.

Getting Motivated To Exercise

Lack of motivation may be one of the primary roadblocks to creating a workout routine. One way to generate the necessary motivation is to create a vision of what exercise will give to you.

Answering the question below will help you do this.

1. List 5-10 ways that exercise will help you in your life.

2. List the ways that exercise can help you specifically to manage your ADHD. I have listed [some above](#).

3. If you started a routine tomorrow, how would your life be different six months from now?

Roadblocks

You may have the necessary motivation, but you may also hold beliefs that make exercise seem like it is not an option for you right now, like:

- not enough time
- can't get outside to run/ can't get to the gym
- too out of shape
- a belief that you are not able to keep to a routine.

There are **workarounds** for these perceived roadblocks.

Time

Let's first look at your **perspective** of your **available time**.

1. List all of your fixed, non-negotiable appointments from the time you wake up until you go to beds (i.e. work, school, book club, soccer practice).

2. Then look at the rest of your time. Describe how are you choosing to use it.

3. What are possible times that you have available?

Place

When you are considering what kind of exercise you will do and where you will exercise think about **what is possible**, rather than what is ideal. For example:

- You may want to bike, but only have time at night and are not comfortable riding in the dark. Could you put your bike on a trainer?
- You want to walk, but when you get home you need to take care of the kids. Could you walk during your lunch break at work?
- You would like to go to the gym, but can't fit it into your schedule more than once or twice a week. Would you be willing to use a DVD a couple times of week?

Remember what you want to get from exercising. If your goal is to get fit and manage your ADHD, maybe you could come up with an optimal solution.

Out of Shape

You may think that you are too out of shape to exercise.

Even if training for a 5K, 10K or even marathon maybe your goal, for example, you can start from where you are and build from there. If you can run or walk 1/2 a mile, start there.

If you are not exercising at all now, walking two blocks each day is better than doing nothing.

Routine

Last, you may struggle to keep a routine; a common struggle for adults with ADHD. Just like creating any habit, following certain **steps** will make **building** and **sustaining** an exercise **routine easier**

To get started in thinking about incorporating exercise into your life, answer the questions below.

1. Make sure your goal is specific and possible. What type of exercise or combination of exercises (yoga, walking, basketball, DVD workout...) do you want to try that fits with your current obligations?

2. Also, make sure it is measureable. What amount of time (20 minutes, 2 hours...) and how often (1x, 3x a week....) are you going to do each exercise.

3. Plan a strategy that will help you follow through. If there are potential obstacles that you need to address, what are the workarounds? What resources (e.g. body double, joining a class...) will help you sustain your efforts?

4. What are the steps toward building and maintaining your routine (e.g. walk/jog a 1 mile for the first 2 weeks, jog a mile the next two weeks, jog 1.5 miles the next 2 weeks...)?

5. What kind of accountability (e.g. friend/family member, online group, ADD coach, training partner...) are you going to build into your plan?

Sleep

When it comes to sleep and ADHD, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest a greater occurrence of sleep problems in adults with ADHD than the general population.

We also know that **lack of sleep** can make your **ADHD symptoms** (challenges with focus and attention) **worse**. So, if you have sleep issues, it is important that you address them as part of a [holistic treatment plan](#) for your ADHD.

Whatever your challenges with sleep they likely fall into one of four areas.

Falling Asleep

Like many with ADHD, you may be an avowed **night owl**; you get a **second wind** late at night. The official medical term is Delayed Sleep-Phase Syndrome.

You may find yourself unable to shut off your mind, even though you really want to go to sleep. Alternatively, you may really enjoy this late night time to yourself, and may even be strongly resistant to changing this habit because you feel like this is the only time you have to yourself.

In either case, lack of sleep may be damaging your health and impairing your ability to function to such an extent that you are **ready to change**. There are **strategies** to help you do this.

Some fall in the category of “**don’t do this.**”

- Stop using electronics and, yes, even TV an hour before bed, as they can arouse you just when you want to slow down.
- Don’t exercise an hour before bed. It can also awaken you.
- Resist becoming engaged in any activity whether for work or pleasure that can stimulate your brain, and make going to sleep harder.
- Avoid eating less than an hour before going to sleep, as the digestive process can interfere with sleep.
- Refrain from ingesting any type of caffeine too late in the day.
- Likewise, if you are taking stimulant medication, the timing of when you take it is important. Taking it too late in the day can also interfere with your ability to fall asleep.

Is there anything from the above list that may be preventing your from going to sleep? As part of your sleep routine look at what you can do to make changes here, first.

Then integrate other **habits to promote sleep**:

- Set a regular bedtime for 7-8 hours before you need to get up.
- Create a bedtime routine that helps you slow down an hour before you want to be asleep.
- Read or listen to books on tape before bed.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Drink warm milk or tea.
- Take a warm bath.
- Exercise during the day
- Have a snack before bed, if you tend to get up in the middle of the night because you are hungry.
- Get up at the same time each day, so you are tired enough to go to sleep. Otherwise the “night owl cycle” will continue.

If creating better sleep habits on your own does not work, it is time to talk to your **doctor**.

- If you are taking a **stimulant medication**, discuss the possibility of taking a dose before bed; some find it can help to fall asleep, as it “turns off your brain.”
- You may also talk to your doctor about non-prescription or prescription **medication** that helps to **induce sleep**.

Waking up

Challenges waking up are also common for many adults with ADHD.

- Going to sleep (and falling asleep) at a reasonable hour is the first step, as not getting enough sleep is one obvious culprit to being able to get up on time.
- If you tend to shut off the alarm and go back to sleep, try putting the alarm across the room or using an alarm, like the [clocky](#). You may even try a [wake up call service](#).
- If you take a stimulant medication, set your alarm for 45 minutes before you need to get up and take your medication. Then set a second alarm for when you need to get up; by the time you need to get up you will be more fully alert.

Restless Sleep

While you may be in bed for “enough hours” during the night, you may not sleep well during that time. You toss and turn, even waking up periodically during the night. And you wake up as tired as when you went to bed.

- If the cause is that you are not able to “**turn off your mind**,” creating better sleep habits to promote sleep is the first step.
- It is also possible that, like the general population, you may suffer from sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome or other syndrome that interferes with your sleep.

If you are unable to pinpoint the cause of your restless sleep and treat it on your own, consider talking to your doctor about having a **sleep study** to determine the cause.

Staying Awake During the Day

An obvious reason for **daytime sleepiness** is that you are not getting enough sleep.

As an adult with ADHD there is also the possibility that you are “tired” because you are **not actively engaged** in what you are doing, and your **nervous system disengages** because you need to do something more interesting.

If you suspect that boredom may be at the root of your daytime sleepiness, try **waking up your brain**.

- Switch to a different activity that is more interesting.
- Work out in the middle of the day, if possible.

- Go for a walk outside.
- Make sure you are taking your stimulant medication when you need it.

If you are not getting enough sleep, the following questions can help you think about the changes you might want to make.

1. In what specific ways (e.g. work more productively, manage emotions better...) would getting sufficient sleep help you?

2. What changes would you need to make to get more sleep?

3. What would you need to do to make these changes?

4. What other information or help do you need to make a plan?

Nutrition

You already know that nutrition, like sleep, has a direct impact on how well you operate and your overall well-being.

While most of what is known about the impact of nutrition on ADHD is not conclusive, there is some research that supports the claim that **nutrition** can **impact** your **ADHD**.

I think it is at least worthwhile to consider how you may want to alter your eating patterns to manage your ADHD symptoms.

And, as you experiment with your nutrition, you may also want to enlist the help of a nutritionist who can help you distill the information and make appropriate choices.

Carbohydrates

We know that eating too many carbohydrates can make you sleepy.

But eating the right amount of **complex carbohydrates** may have a **calming effect** in those with ADHD by increasing the levels of the neurotransmitter, serotonin, found to be deficient in those with ADHD.

This is supported by the studies of neuroscientist Richard Wurtman, Ph.D. of MIT who found that carbohydrates can serve to boost the neurotransmitter, serotonin.

Before you start carbo loading, consider the type of carbs you are eating.

Simple carbohydrates are broken down quickly when your body may not need the energy and is often stored as fat. It can also cause your blood sugar to spike, which can cause your energy level to be more erratic. Examples of simple carbohydrates are white flour, and anything that contains a lot of sugar, such as candy, pastries and soda.

Complex carbohydrates, starches, are broken down more slowly and provide a more steady supply of energy needed to help focus. Therefore, consuming more complex carbohydrates and fewer simple carbohydrates may help you with your ADHD symptoms. Examples of complex carbohydrates are whole wheat, brown rice, oat meal and all legumes, such as bean and lentils.

Protein

There is also enough credible evidence to suggest that eating the recommended amount of **protein** can help you be **more alert** and **focused**.

Wurtman's studies have also shown that ingesting protein “triggers the synthesis of alertness-inducing neurotransmitters,” dopamine and norepinephrine – two of the neurotransmitters that also have been found to be deficient in those with ADHD.

So, if you need to operate at your best during the day, the evidence, both research and anecdotal, suggest it is important to eat a high protein and low carb breakfast and lunch. Doing so can help to increase your ability to focus during the most critical parts of your day.

The Good Fats

Yes, there are good fats!

Particularly, **Omega-3** fatty acids have been touted by many as an effective supplemental treatment for ADHD. While there is no conclusive scientific evidence at this time to support this claim, there are supportive studies and a great deal of anecdotal evidence that have shown promising results.

I think it is worthwhile to investigate and consider increasing the amount of Omega-3s to your diet, particularly the **EPA and DHA forms**.

Omega-3 is a polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA), essential to the health of your body, including your brain. In fact, your brain is about 60 percent fat, with Omega-3s being the most abundant fat in your brain. Moreover, Omega-3 is critical for effective communication and transmission between brain cells.

In order to increase your level of EPA and DHA omega-3s fatty fish are recommended, such as anchovies, carp, halibut, herring, lake trout, mackerel, salmon, striped sea bass, tuna (albacore), and whitefish.

The following questions can help you think about any dietary changes you might want to make to help manage your ADHD.

1. If there are any changes you would like to make your diet, what are they?
2. In addition to helping you manage your ADHD, how might these changes benefit you?
3. What support or resources do you need in order to commit to and follow through in making these changes?

Supplements

Since it is challenging to get adequate levels of the EPA and DHA forms of Omega -3 from your current diet, you may choose to take a fish oil supplement.

In fact, fish oil supplement is the only supplement shown to potentially reduce the symptoms of ADHD. Though there are plenty of other supplements on the market, there is no evidence that any other supplement does indeed reduce the symptoms of ADHD.

Even in the case of fish oil supplements, it is unclear what the correct dosage should be or whether one brand is better than another. In addition, there is the potential for fish oil supplements to exacerbate a preexisting condition or interfere with some medications.

So, it is important to consult with your healthcare provider before taking this or any other supplement. Your healthcare provider can also help you determine the best dose.

Meditation

Having ADHD often means having a very active mind.

If you can slow down and clear your mind, even for a brief time, you may find that you can bring more clarity to your thinking. This clarity may be absent when your mind is full with too many thoughts.

Preliminary research shows that **meditation** may lead to structural changes in the brain, resulting in a reduction of **ADHD symptoms**, such as **inattention** and **impulsivity**.

At the very least meditation is a way to create mindfulness on a regular basis. And it will not have an adverse affect on your well being. Can't hurt, right?

And, yes, you can do this even if you have ADHD!

Before you dismiss this suggestion as being preposterous for a person with ADHD, take a look at Jon Kabatt-Zinn's book, [*Wherever You Go There You Are*](#). He demonstrates how you can meditate even for a short time and still reap the benefits. You will see that you can incorporate meditation into your life in a way that works for you.

Not ready? Try [One-Moment Meditation](#). It is a fun helpful way to be more mindful.

[Mindful](#) is also a great site, if you are interested in checking out more resources.

NeuroFeedback

This option will take much more of a commitment on your part.

Neurofeedback training is designed to change the electrical frequency of the brain. The goal as a **treatment for ADHD** is to **increase attentiveness** and **decrease hyperactivity and impulsiveness**.

If you look into neurofeedback, you will find claims from some that it was positively life changing. You will also find statements from others who maintain that it did not work at all.

In addition to the conflicting anecdotal claims, to date there have been no scientific studies showing its long term effectiveness. And the process is very costly and time consuming.

However, if you do consider this treatment, it worth noting that there are no negative side effects. So, it is up to you to weigh out the potential costs and benefits.

Brain Training Software

Another alternative that has gotten a lot of press is brain training software.

The only one that seems to be effective in the long term and is backed by solid scientific research is [Cogmed Training](#) to improve working memory.

According to Cogmed, 80% of “users see measureable improvements.” And the research shows that the improvements are not only seen in the game, but also in real life improvements in working memory for users.

3. Which of your ADHD symptoms would you like to better manage?

4. What do you want to include as part your holistic treatment plan for managing your ADHD?

¹Barkely, Russell, [Fact Sheet: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\) Topics](#)