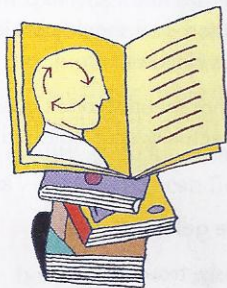


Ways to Thrive With ADD

It's easy to find examples of people with ADD who have leveraged their strengths into impressive adult achievements — Sir Richard Branson, Michael Phelps, Justin Timberlake and (perhaps) Albert Einstein, to name a few. They managed to thrive with ADD, and so can you. Here's how:



Educate yourself.

"The diagnosis becomes therapeutic through education," writes *Driven to Distraction* author Edward Hallowell. "The more you know about the kind of mind you have — whether or not you call it ADD — the better able you will be to improve your life."

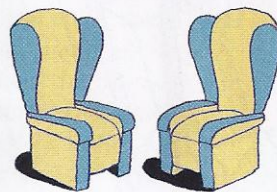
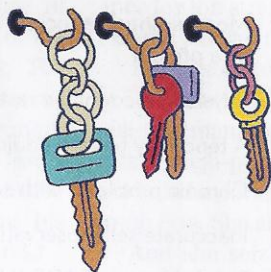
Hallowell's books are good places to begin learning more about ADD. You can also ask the healthcare professional who gives you a diagnosis to recommend books or support groups. Numerous Web sites, including the site for the Attention Deficit Disorder Association at www.add.org, offer support, resources and information.

It may also be helpful for your partner and family members to become familiar with some of the fundamental patterns, challenges and gifts associated with ADD. Hallowell notes that having an informed, compassionate partner tends to be a huge advantage for many adults with ADD.

Create systems to remind you.

"You want to create external reminders," says Hallowell. For example, put a basket by the front door for your keys. Hang hooks by your front door for coats, scarves, umbrellas or whatever you carry with you. Utilize the built-in reminder systems in your computer or phone to alert you when it's time to do a new task. "These are all necessary and helpful structural changes."

At the Hallowell Center, coaches encourage to-do lists. Gina Masullo now carries a notebook with her at all times. "That way, when something pops into my head, I no longer have to act on it immediately," she says. "I don't get distracted and then not remember what I was doing before. It sounds so simple, but for me, keeping to-do lists has been life changing." She even installed a white board in her shower. "It's where a lot of ideas come to me, so I figured, why not?"



Get support.

Coaching, counseling or other support is important, says psychologist Sanford Silverman, because ADD often occurs in tandem with another disorder, like depression, anxiety, OCD, substance abuse or bipolar disorder — and those things need to be addressed as well.

"I want to help people capitalize on their strengths," says Silverman, who uses a combination of therapies, including neurofeedback and traditional talk-therapy, to help people manage their ADD and other disorders. "I work with them on all kinds of issues: family issues, relationships, social skills training — basically, how they can maximize their performance in all aspects of their lives."

Those whose marriages are being stressed by ADD dynamics may also benefit from specialized counseling and support strategies.

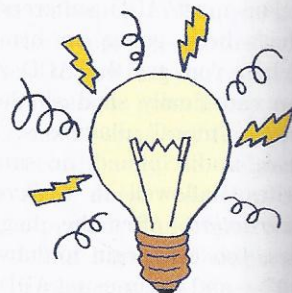
Recognize and build on your strengths.

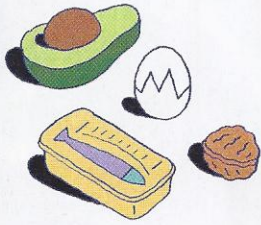
Work with a coach or ADD-experienced counselor to identify your strengths and then devise strategies to use and build on them.

"One of the hallmarks of ADD is impulsivity. But, often, that's very good for creativity," says marriage consultant Melissa Orlov. "The ADD brain doesn't filter much — which is part of the reason they're so distracted — but that might enable that person to solve a problem in a completely new way."

For example, at work, someone with ADD might be better suited to brainstorm or initiate a new project rather than complete it, or to step into a project midway and help solve problems that have cropped up.

Helen Driscoll, a former screenwriter based in Los Angeles who was diagnosed with ADD 20 years ago, knew her strength was brainstorming. "I'm good at the ideas, and my friend was always really good at working within the scene," she says of their successful writing partnership. "Our system worked well for us."





Eat protein and healthy fats.

Low blood sugar can be especially troublesome for individuals with ADD, as it can radically disrupt their brain function and mood.

“Having some protein in your breakfast is a good idea because it keeps your blood sugar from yo-yoing,” says Hallowell. “If all you have are carbohydrates, your blood sugar goes way up, but then it goes way down and you start feeling sleepy or distracted.” For this reason, a steady supply of protein is important throughout the entire day. “Whenever you have food, try to balance protein with carbohydrates. Try to stay away from straight carbohydrates.”

Omega-3 fats are good for everyone, but they can be especially beneficial for people with ADD. Hallowell advises people with ADD to take up to 5,000 milligrams a day. Good whole-food sources of omega-3s include walnuts, flaxseeds, flaxseed oil and dark leafy greens.



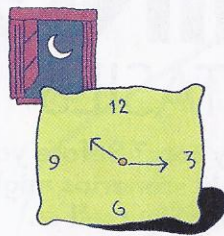
Exercise.

“Exercise generates all kinds of chemicals in your brain that your body loves,” Hallowell says. “It’s

better than medication. It’s remarkably helpful.”

Masullo credits her exercise regimen with helping her feel more focused and calm. “Before I started exercising I would experience a lot of ups and downs,” she says. “If I skip the gym even one day I feel a difference.”

If you have trouble sticking with your exercise routine, join a class or a group fitness program. Paying class fees and being accountable to fellow students is great motivation. Scheduling time for workouts on your calendar or hiring a trainer or coach can also help.



Sleep.

“Unfortunately, with ADD, sleep problems are common — whether it’s getting to sleep or staying asleep,” says Silverman. Disrupted sleep can hinder already precarious energy levels.

“It’s all energy regulation,” says Jennifer Koretsky, which is why even though she considers herself a night owl, she tries not to stay up late anymore.

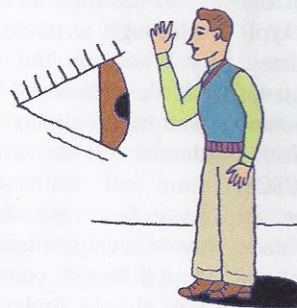
To get more and better-quality sleep, start by establishing a set bedtime — and stick to it. Half an hour or so before your set bedtime, switch into “wind-down” mode by doing something relaxing like reading, stretching or taking a bath. The ritual will help prime your body for sleep. Minimize the amount of light coming into your bed-

room with thick curtains and by keeping electronics out of the room. Removing electronics also reinforces that the bedroom isn’t the living room or family room; it’s where you sleep, not where you work or play video games. (For more sleep-enhancing strategies, search on “Getting to Sleep” at experiencelife.com.)

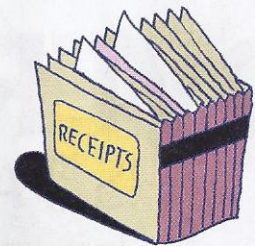
Understand how others perceive you.

“People with ADD are often labeled lazy, though that’s very far from the truth,” says Orlov. “But people say, ‘Well, gee, you weren’t able to complete this task, so that must mean that you’re lazy.’ Another thing you sometimes hear is ‘self-centered.’ And that’s because a person with ADD can be very self-contained — they’re doing their own thing and are perfectly happy not interacting as much.” They may also not notice (or remember) that someone near them is waiting or expecting them to complete a task. And many spouses of ADD partners wind up carrying more than their share of household responsibilities as a result.

If you’re not conscious of these dynamics, it can bring additional stress to your relationships.



If you feel comfortable, wait until a neutral time (not the middle of a fight or when your relationship is tense) and ask friends or family members for insights on your behaviors. If that feels too scary, imagine a group of your friends or family and what they might say. You can also consult with a therapist or coach about how people might perceive you. That self-knowledge and awareness can help you reframe your behaviors and better manage your energy.



Be OK with being “organized enough.”

Speaking from his own ADD experience, Hallowell writes in *Delivered from Distraction*: “We have trouble organizing things. We have trouble organizing time. We have trouble organizing thoughts. We have trouble organizing data.” Trying to become super-organized is “not only out of our reach, but it is also unnecessary.” You can still reach your goals without having a house or office that looks like it should be photographed for *Better Homes and Gardens*. So take the focus off trying to be perfect and use that energy to focus on what’s attainable instead. ☺

Jessie Sholl is the author of *Dirty Secret: A Daughter Comes Clean About Her Mother’s Compulsive Hoarding* (Gallery, 2010). She lives in New York City.