

# STRUGGLES & SUCCESSES FOR ADULTS LIVING WITH ADHD

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Everyone has days when they feel distracted, hyperactive or impulsive. Some days you may even feel bored, have difficulty remembering appointments or just cannot adequately manage your time! Who among us has not procrastinated at some point or had difficulty getting along with certain individuals. You may not classify these characteristics as symptoms of a health condition, but when they overwhelm your life and daily function, making it difficult to perform tasks you need to do in the run of a day, a week, or longer, then a diagnosis of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may be considered. The symptoms must have persisted for at least six months for such a diagnosis, and other medical causes of the symptoms first need to be ruled out.

Most people have heard of ADHD and many associate it with school-aged children. Unfortunately, however, children diagnosed with ADHD do not magically recover from this disorder when they graduate from high school. Instead, they grow up and become adults with ADHD. With increased awareness about this condition, some children who were never diagnosed with ADHD in their youth are being identified in adulthood. Research indicates that ADHD is a genetically transmitted disorder affecting girls and boys, women and men. Symptoms usually become apparent after the age of seven when higher demands of self-organization and executive functions are expected. Some girls present with symptoms during hormonal changes in their twelfth and thirteenth year. Others with ADHD develop adequate compensatory strategies so the diagnosis is less apparent when measured by function.

According to Edward M. Hallowell, M.D., “the treatment of ADHD begins with hope.” Most individuals who have a diagnosis of ADHD have struggled through life to meet the expectations set by those who do not understand and therefore do not accommodate for their condition. Those with ADHD therefore often experience embarrassment, humiliation, and a loss of confidence, leading

to poor self-image. They may have difficulty recognizing their good qualities because of frequent failures to meet expectations and the longtime struggle just to keep their heads above water.

Dr. Hallowell breaks treatment of ADHD into five basic areas: diagnosis, education, structure support and coaching, various forms of psychotherapy, and medication. We should all be educated about what a diagnosis of ADHD means, for an adult or child. Those who do not live with this diagnosis need to acknowledge those who do, and be open to support their efforts to be successful in their work or play. Compensatory and coping strategies are imperative to being successful in spite of this diagnosis. A pamphlet titled *50 Tips on the Management of Adult Attention Deficit Disorder* ([www.faslink.org](http://www.faslink.org)) outlines a variety of practical suggestions for this purpose and focuses on the following categories:

- **Insight and education:** Be sure of the diagnosis and educate yourself. Find a coach, someone you work well with to support and encourage you through various tasks. Educate and involve others so they can better understand and help you. Listen to feedback from trusted others. Give yourself permission to be yourself. Remember the condition is a neuropsychiatric condition and is not a weakness in character or a moral failing.
- **Performance management:** Establish external structure with lists, reminders, notes, rituals and files. Many people with ADHD are visually oriented so colour-coding and adding pizzazz to your environment is encouraged. Embrace challenges but acknowledge and anticipate that all challenges will not end in success. Perfectionism is not realistic. Make deadlines and break down large tasks into smaller ones. Prioritize and avoid procrastination. Notice where and when you work best and let yourself work under those conditions when possible. Leave time between engagements to collect your thoughts as transitions may be difficult. Keep a notepad with you wherever you are and jot down good ideas when they hit you. Read with a pen in hand to focus your attention.

• **Mood management:** Include “blow-out” time in your routine to allow yourself to let go and be yourself. Recharge your batteries by giving yourself time to waste without feeling guilty about it. Choose good addictions such as exercise. Exercise vigorously and regularly as part of your treatment. Understand mood changes and ways to manage them. Plan ways to deal with inevitable ADHD blues. Use “time-outs” with yourself when you are upset or over-stimulated. Advocate for yourself. Find and join groups and spend time with friends where you are liked, appreciated, understood and enjoyed.

In her book, *ADD in the Workplace*, Dr. Kathleen G. Nadeau suggests that adults with ADHD do the following to optimize success in the workplace:

1. Minimize paperwork to maximize success.
2. De-stress to avoid distress.
3. Plan to be early to arrive on time.
4. Simplify your filing system.
5. Do it now or write it down.
6. Negotiate for tasks that call on your strengths.
7. Schedule interruptions or free time blocks.
8. Focus on ADHD solutions, not ADHD problems.
9. Get everything in writing; don't depend on your memory.
10. Focus on task completion with no loose strings!



Although sometimes it is difficult, especially when people with ADHD have struggled to succeed most of their lives, it is essential to recognize the strengths that are brought to the table in spite of the condition. Their particular way of seeing, hearing and sensing the environment around them is unique and may even be better than other ways of doing it. Hyper focusing can be viewed as a weakness in some situations, but think how productive a person with ADHD who is hyper focused can be when they are interested in their work or enjoying what they are doing. Individuals with ADHD are sensitive and emotionally open to understanding others, having been misunderstood most of their lives. Their creativity and passion for certain things and issues is highly motivating and inspiring. They are outgoing and intelligent, their brains working on problems in ways others would never consider. Because they seek stimulation to manage their hyperactivity, they can be excellent multitaskers, always ready for action, with a drive for excitement and stimulation. The key to success with people who have a diagnosis of ADHD is to allow them to work within their own means, and provide them with the accommodations and support they need to utilize their individual strengths. It is essential for us all to acknowledge that the “normal” or usual way of doing is not always what works best for everyone.

## did you KNOW?

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) invites NSTU members to sign up for our Wellness email list at **Be\_Well@nstu.ca**.

Please contact Erin at [ekeefe@nstu.ca](mailto:ekeefe@nstu.ca) to provide her with your NSTU email address. The **Be\_Well@nstu.ca** list will provide information about the EIP and other wellness topics.

