Lifestyle Changes That Can Make Living with ADHD Easier

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Living with ADHD Doesn't Have to Be Difficult

When I was first diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), I was greatly relieved at being able to put a name to what was wrong. Soon, however, I realized that my diagnosis was only the beginning.

I dove into anything and everything ADHD related. How could I best manage my symptoms? What could I do to make things easier? What tricks could I implement to help myself the most?

Much like healthy eating is a lifestyle and not a diet, living with ADHD is also a lifestyle. Permanent changes in the way I thought and the way I lived were going to be needed.

When I looked at ADHD as not just a list of symptoms to control, but a lifestyle to manage, things became much clearer and a whole lot easier! Health isn't just about one part of you, it's about how all parts work together to form a whole.

Looking at ADHD in that way the question became, what lifestyle changes do I need to make in order to be my best self? How do I erase everything I've ever been taught about how things "should" be done in order to learn to accommodate how my brain works?

It can be overwhelming to make drastic lifestyle changes, but you can always take things at your own pace. You decide how slowly you go and what you change.

With a little planning, patience, and understanding of your own self, you can build a lifestyle that is best suited for getting the most out of life with ADHD.

In my personal experience, there were a few key areas that needed to be addressed first.

Education

Change starts with education. The first lifestyle choice you can make is to be active in your own treatment. Don't rely on doctors or other health care professionals to tell you everything you need to know about ADHD.

There are many resources out there; online you can find bloggers, articles, discussion groups, and national organizations on ADHD. Scour the library and bookstores for books that can help you. Read everything you can.

Learn what ADHD is and what it is not. When I was first diagnosed I realized how little I truly knew about ADHD and how much it impacted a person's life.

Learning everything you can not only help you find ways to improve your life, but it also puts you in a position to take an active role in your treatment.

Don’t be afraid to ask questions!

Learn how your brain operates and you become your best advocate. Education and awareness are key.

Medication

Some people benefit greatly from taking medication for ADHD, while other people choose to remain medication free. I applaud both groups.

It is up to each individual to decide whether they want or need medication. You know what is best for you and your body.

Taking medication is definitely a lifestyle choice. You will need to take medication at the same time each day and you have to be aware of what the medication does to your body as well as how you are affected as it wears off.

Sometimes it will even be important to know if certain types of events are going to take place when you are on medication or after it has worn off. I have found it’s important to have a plan, especially for my daughter if she is attending an event medication free.

Not taking medication is just as much a lifestyle choice. Being medication-free means needing to know your own highs and lows, as well as tools and tricks to get you through the day and the tasks you must complete.

Nutrition

One of the biggest lifestyle changes you can make that will help manage the symptoms of ADHD is following a nutritious diet. Sound nutrition plays an important role in managing symptoms.

Sugar exacerbates ADHD symptoms. Preservatives and chemicals in our food are making us sick. The connection between a diet full of processed foods and ADHD cannot be ignored.

I have even read some articles in defense of the argument that ADHD is not real that state the “symptoms” of what we call ADHD are just a reaction to the foods we are eating.

While I do not prescribe to the theory that ADHD is not real, I do believe in the correlation between an increase in symptoms and the foods we eat.

ADHD is very real. Science has proven it. However, poor food choices lead to a lack of focus and surges in sugar levels. Add that to ADHD and you have a recipe for disaster.

The best thing you can do for yourself is to follow a healthy, nutritious diet full of whole foods. Do away with products laden with sugars and chemicals. The benefit is improved focus, more energy, better sleep and a healthier you!

I know from experience how much worse my ADHD symptoms are when my diet is poor. If I eat a lot of junk food and sugar, my focus is non-existent and I’m much more forgetful and scattered. I’m sluggish and I feel like the chaos in my head is out of control.

When I follow a mostly plant-based diet and limit myself to the occasional treat, I find that I don’t forget what I’m saying in mid-sentence, I can concentrate on my work and I don’t feel so flustered and foggy.

Exercise

Exercise is good for anyone, ADHD or not, but if you have ADHD being active will gift you with improved mental clarity, better sleep, and stress reduction.

Any type of regular exercise that gets you moving and increases your heart rate is beneficial.

Do what you love — play in the yard with the kids, play a sport, walk, jog, bicycle, dance, join a gym. The choices are limitless.

Exercising outdoors is even better. Nature grounds us, and for those of us with ADHD, this can be a lifesaver.

Time spent out of doors calms, soothes and refreshes. I try to walk every morning and then later in the day I will do some other type of exercise.

I find that I feel so much better after those morning walks. I am more relaxed and I feel like I have better focus when I get to work.

Next page: therapy, organization, and more tips for living with ADHD.

Therapy

If you have ADHD, you may want to consider therapy or counseling.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) helps patients change behavior by focusing on thought patterns as well as overcoming the obstacles of everyday life.

Behavior therapy isn't a magical formula to make it all go away, but it will help you learn to change the negative messages to positive ones and to deal with the day-to-day problems that having ADHD can bring.

Counseling could also prove beneficial. Having ADHD isn't just hard on us, it's hard on the people who love us. Counseling can help us to improve our social skills to better benefit our professional and personal relationships.

Our relationships can suffer because of our impulsive actions and words. Misunderstandings at work and at home create a strained atmosphere. We can lose our jobs and our loved ones. Counseling can help us to save these relationships.

Organization

It may sound a little strange to call organization a lifestyle change, but for those of us affected by ADHD, organization of some sort has to become a way of life.

I don't know anyone more disorganized than I am. Sometimes I wonder if I will ever find an organizational system that I can stick with, or if I am doomed to be lost in piles of paper clutter forever.

I can't tell you how many important documents I have lost — for years I had no system at all. Right now I am looking at four distinct paper piles staring at me from around the room.

I have a box for papers that need to be shredded, an accordion file for temporary storage, and a crate with file folders for important papers, manuals, and receipts. I try to get the papers in the appropriate places before the piles get too big.

Organization isn't just about paper clutter, either. Organization also entails keeping up with appointments, knowing where your belongings are, and managing time.

I still prefer to write things down, so I have a spiral-bound planner — I write down everything from appointments to when bills are due, and phone calls I need to make.

I use alarms on my phone for just about everything I need to do. I set them for appointments, for taking medicine,

and simply leaving for work on time. Sometimes I use them to keep me on task during the day too.

I am slowly beginning to embrace productivity apps for ADHD. This has been a bit harder as I'm not as technologically-inclined as I would like, but I'm getting there.

Organization is always a work in progress for me, it seems. I am constantly reading articles on organization to find ideas to help me evolve.

Manage Stress

Who hasn't heard that we need to get rid of the stress in our lives? Stress can eat away at us, but it can also make our ADHD symptoms worse.

There is always going to be a certain amount of stress that goes with our daily lives, but we can't let worry take over.

Being mindful can certainly help us deal with stress. Bringing yourself into the moment and concentrating on your breathing for even a minute or two can actually help.

Meditation can improve focus and help you beat stress. I try to practice a few minutes of meditation every day.

Sometimes my mind wanders, sometimes I fall asleep, but I still work on it. Spending a few minutes in mindfulness helps me feel renewed.

You can also try massage, acupuncture or acupressure to help you relax your body and mind.

Exercise is a great stress manager. Music or practicing a hobby can also help reduce stress. Working puzzles such as crossword puzzles or other word or number puzzles can increase concentration and they also stimulate the creation of new brain cells.

Take some time out for yourself. Learn to say no if you have to.

The ADHD mind is a whirlwind and it needs to relax and unwind. Spend a few minutes each day doing something you enjoy.

Taking care of yourself is as important as taking care of everyone else you love.

A Lifestyle You Enjoy

Creating a lifestyle that is ADHD-friendly is not impossible. With a little practice, you can learn to live a life you love that is not run by the racing thoughts of your ADHD brain.

Above all, be patient with yourself. You will try some things that will just seem to click, and other things may not.

I keep looking for tips and tricks I can use to help me manage my ADHD. Some things work for me, some things don't. Some things work but I just don't do them.

Lifestyle changes aren't always easy, and sometimes you may even disregard all your own best advice. That's okay.

Never stop learning — there is new information every day. There are communities out there full of people who know exactly what you are going through. We can learn from each other and we can support one another.

Perhaps one of the biggest lifestyle changes you can make is to actively learn to accept yourself, flaws and all. You may have spent a lifetime feeling like you didn't fit in; you may have believed all the negative messages you

received while growing up.

Know that you are an amazing, intelligent, and creative being. You deserve great things and you are capable of greatness.

Having ADHD may not always be easy, but it’s always interesting. Enjoy the things that make you unique.

Living with ADHD may require a few lifestyle changes, but they are all worth it!