

# ADHD and Stress

Does ADHD cause stress? Can stress cause ADHD? Is living with ADHD just a vicious cycle? How can the cycle be interrupted?

Whether you're looking for information about ADHD and stress for children, teens, or adults, you'll find answers here.

## Is ADHD Linked to Stress?

It's not surprising that someone living with ADHD might also experience excessive levels of stress. ADHD symptoms, such as trouble focusing, short attention span, hyperactivity, and poor organizational skills, can be overwhelming. ADHD symptoms can lead to frustration and feelings of loss of control and hopelessness -- a sure set-up for daily stress. ADHD may also be accompanied by other mental health conditions -- conditions that are also linked to stress including:

- Depression
- Negative thoughts
- Anxiety
- Difficulty sleeping

Are these conditions secondary to ADHD or themselves causes of stress? No one knows for sure, but it's important to address stress, in addition to your ADHD.

## Why Worry About ADHD and Stress?

Everyone feels stress. Stress helps you focus on something that requires your attention -- and that's good. It can make you work harder and react quicker. Otherwise, you might stumble into something dangerous.

Stress becomes bad when it overwhelms your ability to act. When stress levels remain high for long periods, problems like depression and heart disease can result.

So what's the connection between stress and ADHD? ADHD presents ongoing challenges that can make stress and frustration become out of control. If you have ADHD and a lot of unmanaged stress, it could raise your risk of some health problems and worsen symptoms of others, including:

- Tics or Tourette's syndrome
- Depression or anxiety attacks
- Fibromyalgia or chronic pain syndrome

### **Suggestions for Dealing With ADHD and Stress**

Anyone with ADHD -- children, teens, and adults -- can do a lot to manage ADHD and reduce stress. These strategies can be adapted for any age and include the following suggestions:

Follow through on your ADHD treatment plan

Follow through on the ADHD treatment plan, whether it's medication and/or behavior therapy. Talk to your doctor before making any changes to your treatment plan.

Learn stress management skills

You can learn skills to deal more effectively or minimize stress. Here are some areas to consider:

- Strategies for dealing with or avoiding stressful situations
- Developing more effective problem-solving skills
- Improving communication skills
- Learning to speak up for yourself and your needs (self-advocacy)

Develop relaxation techniques

Learn techniques for meditation or relaxation. Biofeedback may also be useful to help monitor your level of stress and how you respond to it.

Remove stressors when appropriate

Some stressors can simply be removed or avoided altogether. For example, for a child with ADHD, you may want to schedule play dates with only one other child and monitor the play closely. A teen or adult may want to cut back on extra activities during stressful times.

Take control of your life wherever you can

This can be especially helpful to children and teens who often feel lack of control of their ADHD. Older children and teens, for example, should be part of any school planning team that reviews the student's educational needs and plans. Adults may want to learn how to make ADHD-friendly career choices or ask for help to lessen stressors in the workplace.

Maintain overall health

Staying healthy helps you manage ADHD better and also helps your body respond

more readily to any extra stress. Children, teens, and adults with ADHD can all take these steps to maintain health:

- Minimize your intake of caffeine or nicotine.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Get enough sleep.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol.

Seek out support

Friends, family, others with ADHD, and mental health professionals who understand ADHD can all help children, teens, and adults deal with stress. Here are some suggestions:

- Teens and adults can benefit from working with an ADHD coach, a professional organizer, or a job coach.
- Connect with groups that provide ADHD information and support.

If you're not sure where to go for support, here are some places to start:

Attention Deficit Disorder Resources (<http://www.addresources.org>)

Children and Adults with AD/HD (<http://www.chadd.org>).

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