

# BECOMING AN ADULT WITH ADHD

**WHAT TO EXPECT & USEFUL ADVICE**





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# IS THIS GUIDE FOR ME?

## IS THIS GUIDE FOR ME?

If you're coming up to the 18+ milestone and have already been diagnosed with ADHD, or you're an adult who's been having treatment for ADHD since you were a child or teenager, then this guide is for you.

As you get older you'll have more freedom. You'll be making some important life decisions.

Inside this guide you will find information on how your ADHD could affect you as you pass 18 and give you some useful hints and tips about how to make the right choices for you.

### THE POSITIVES!

ADHD can make some things easier for you, not harder. Once you recognise your strengths, you can use these to your advantage.

Adults with ADHD who have found ways to control their symptoms can offer several valuable qualities. As individuals, they can be:

- Energetic
- Creative
- Sensitive

# WHAT IS ADHD?

## WHAT IS ADHD?

### FAST FACTS

- a) ADHD is a common mental health disorder
- b) ADHD affects people differently. However 3 key symptoms are common to people who are diagnosed with ADHD:
  - Inattention
  - Hyperactivity
  - Impulsive behaviour
- c) ADHD has a strong genetic basis: if you are diagnosed, your family members are more likely to have ADHD than the general population
- d) We don't know the exact cause of ADHD, but researchers think that it's linked to two chemicals that are needed for the nerves in the brain to work normally: dopamine and noradrenaline
- e) At least 66% of people who are diagnosed with ADHD as a child will continue to have symptoms as adults

### WILL MY SYMPTOMS CHANGE AS I GET OLDER?

ADHD symptoms in adults vary in their form and severity. That said, there are some general changes that occur as people with ADHD move into adulthood:

**Inattention** – forgetfulness and difficulty in concentrating may continue as an adult

**Hyperactivity** – adults tend to experience feelings of unrest and nervousness rather than hyperactivity (constant moving, fidgeting) which is more typical in childhood

**Impulsive behaviour** – impulsiveness may reduce over time but it can persist into adulthood

# OTHER CONCERNS: ASSOCIATED CONDITIONS

## OTHER CONCERNS: ASSOCIATED CONDITIONS

Do you experience dyslexia, depression or anxiety? If so, you're not alone. **More than 2/3 of people with ADHD have at least one other coexisting condition, too.**

Additional conditions like these may well continue in to your adult life. If you start feeling any different, or you notice changes in your symptoms, then do speak to your healthcare professional.

### CONDITIONS THAT WE KNOW ARE MORE COMMON IN ADULTS WITH ADHD INCLUDE:

- **Disruptive behaviour** – people with ADHD are more likely to be argumentative, blame others and find it difficult to follow rules
- **Anxiety** – up to 53% of adults with ADHD may also have an anxiety disorder. This may make you worry a lot and feel stressed and tired more than is normal
- **Mood disorders** – about 38% of adults with ADHD also suffer with extreme changes in mood
- **Learning disorders** – people with ADHD are more likely to have a learning disorder such as dyslexia
- **Substance abuse** – adolescents and adults with ADHD may be more prone to alcohol or drug abuse

### REMEMBER

If you have any questions or concerns about conditions linked with ADHD, speak to your healthcare professional.

# TRANSITIONING TO ADULT HEALTH SERVICES

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If you continue to show symptoms of ADHD, or you've been having treatment from the **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or paediatric services** for conditions linked to your ADHD, then you'll normally be transferred to the **Adult Mental Health Services (AMHS)**.

## PLANNING AHEAD

This transition should be **planned in advance** and you will need to make sure that you **speak to your current healthcare professional about how and when this transition will occur for you.**

## HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR THE TRANSITION?

- Some adult health services will advise that you can only transition when you are 18 - ask your healthcare professional to confirm when you will be able to transition
- Depending on where you live, there may not be an official transition policy so it is important to discuss how and when the transition will happen with your current healthcare professional
- If your symptoms are not thought to be severe, the transition process may be less clear. Seek advice and help from your healthcare professional
- Ideally, you should have at least one meeting about your transition with a healthcare professional from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services **and** Adult Mental Health Services. Speak to your current healthcare professional about organising a time and date for this

## WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM THE ADULT HEALTH SERVICES?

- Once you turn 18 you'll no longer need a parent or carer present with you. But remember they can still provide valuable support during meetings and when making decisions
- If you're transferred to the Adult Mental Health Services you'll see an adult psychiatrist rather than a paediatrician
- You will usually undergo a full assessment of your needs
- Some adult psychiatrists may be less familiar with the day-to-day problems you face than the specialists that you've seen as a child so be prepared to talk about your ADHD in detail
- Be open and honest: you may be asked questions about your personal life, education and any coexisting conditions such as alcohol misuse and any emotional problems that you are experiencing

### REMEMBER

Involve your healthcare professional sooner rather than later. Transitioning to Adult Mental Health Services takes time, and will depend on your condition and the healthcare resources available.

## COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

Medication is the first-line treatment for adults with ADHD with either moderate or severe symptoms. For some, psychotherapy may also be beneficial.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a type of psychotherapy that can be used to help improve self-esteem, energy, creativity and curiosity. This may be offered to you as an alternative treatment to medication, or as well as medication depending on the severity of your symptoms.

For more information visit:

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/cognitive-behavioural-therapy](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cognitive-behavioural-therapy)



# HOW CAN ADHD IMPACT ON MY LIFE AS AN ADULT?

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66% of people diagnosed with ADHD as a child or adolescent will continue to experience symptoms into adulthood.

ADHD is prevalent in approximately 5% of the adult population.

### ADHD CAN AFFECT THINGS LIKE:

- **Education** – 75% of adults with ADHD have problems with education
- **Employment** – you may find it hard to be on time and struggle with professional relationships at work
- **Driving** – you may feel angry towards other drivers and have a tendency to speed
- **Relationships** – you might find yourself becoming impatient or having frequent temper outbursts
- **Substance abuse** – adults with ADHD are more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs than those without ADHD
- **Sexual Behaviour** – sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are more common in people with ADHD. It's important to practice safe sex and take precautions. For more information visit [www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/sex-activities-and-risk](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/sex-activities-and-risk)

### REMEMBER

Your symptoms of ADHD may continue to affect you in your daily life as an adult.

- **Inattention** – problems with organisation, planning, time management and memory
- **Hyperactivity** – feeling restless, excessive worrying, becoming easily bored
- **Impulsivity** – speaking without thinking, being irritable, having unpredictable moods

# WHAT STEPS CAN I TAKE TO MAKE LIFE EASIER?

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If you're on medication for ADHD, then self-help strategies could help you get the best out of your treatment. Whatever your age, these may help you to manage your ADHD and take back some control.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR SYMPTOMS

Healthcare professionals have found that it can be helpful to try and recognise how your symptoms of ADHD affect you in your daily life, from interacting with people to performing tasks.

Try to think about situations that you find particularly difficult and write down why you find them challenging. You could discuss these with your healthcare professional to try to work out your behaviour patterns and symptom triggers.

## GETTING YOURSELF ORGANISED

Don't worry: it's a fact that having ADHD can make you more likely to be disorganised. You may also find it more difficult managing your time and working out which tasks to do first than people without ADHD.

### HELPFUL TIPS

- Buy a diary and at the start of each week write down **all** of the tasks that you need to do by the end of the week
- Tick off tasks when you finish them
- Look at your diary each night so that you can get ready for the following day
- Set alarms on your phone to remind you of things you need to do
- Set yourself small and large goals such as 'write the first section of my CV' or 'research apprenticeships in my local area'. As you complete each goal, reward yourself with a small treat

## NUTRITION & EXERCISE

A good diet and plenty of exercise is great for everyone - not just people with ADHD!

### WHAT IS A BALANCED DIET?

A balanced diet is one where you eat a wide variety of foods in the right portions. Most people in the UK eat and drink too many calories, too much fat, sugar and salt, and not enough fruit, vegetables, oily fish or fibre.

For more information about eating a balanced diet, and details on the proportions of food groups that you should be eating visit the NHS Eatwell Guide [www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide)

### HOW MUCH EXERCISE SHOULD I BE DOING?

Exercise may help with some of the symptoms of ADHD, such as hyperactivity. The NHS Guidelines recommend that adults of 19+ should do two types of physical activity each week:

- **150 minutes of moderate** or **75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity**
- AND
- **Strength exercises** that work **all of** the major muscles on 2 days a week

For more information visit [www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise)

### JOIN A SUPPORT GROUP

Your healthcare professional might recommend finding a self-help or support group in your local area. Joining a support group is a great way of meeting people in a similar situation to you. You can share and discuss your experience of ADHD with them.

### HOW DO I FIND SUPPORT GROUPS NEAR ME?

To find national and local support groups, visit The UK ADHD Partnership (UKAP) [www.ukadhd.com](http://www.ukadhd.com)



# WHAT CHOICES DO I HAVE AT 18+?

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The law in England states you must do one of the following until you're 18: Stay in full-time education, start an apprenticeship or traineeship, or stay in part-time education whilst working or volunteering for 20 or more hours a week. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, you can leave education at the age of 16.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

### University

If you have A-levels, an Advanced Apprenticeship, BTEC Level 3s or other Level 3 qualifications you could explore the possibility of going to university.

#### Advantages:

- You'll be able to choose a subject that you particularly enjoyed at A-Level or equivalent
- There are lots of universities to choose from across the UK and abroad
- You may get to move away from home and live with other people your age
- Degrees are highly regarded by employers

#### Disadvantages:

- Your academic work load is likely to increase and you'll have to spend more time studying than you did at sixth form or college
- You need to get good grades at A-level or equivalent to get into university, and so it's important to work hard and choose a subject that you are good at and enjoy

If you don't have Level 3 qualifications but you would like to study at university in the future, you could do so through access courses or through studying alongside work.

### Access courses

The Access to Higher Education Diploma is a qualification which prepares people without Level 3 qualifications for studying at university. The courses are run at colleges throughout England and Wales and are available in a wide range of subjects.

For more information on The Access to Higher Education Diploma please visit [www.accesstohe.ac.uk](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk)

Scotland uses the Wider Access Programme to support access to higher education for adult learners. ([www.scottishwideraccess.org](http://www.scottishwideraccess.org))

### Degree apprenticeships

Degree apprenticeships are a great way to combine work with studying for a university degree. Apprentices are employed by a company and split their time between university study and the workplace.

#### Advantages:

- You'll be studying towards a full degree in your chosen profession
- You'll be earning an apprentice wage for your time spent in the workplace
- Gain real on-the-job experience that will help with your studies
- The cost of course fees will be shared between the government and your employer

#### Disadvantages:

- Degree apprenticeships are profession-specific and so you need to be sure that you are studying in an area that you want to build your career in
- It may take longer to complete your degree than if you were studying at university full-time
- You may be contracted to remain at the company who are sponsoring you for a number of years after you complete your degree

For more information visit the UCAS website - [www.ucas.com/alternatives/apprenticeships/apprenticeships-england/what-apprenticeships-are-available/degree-apprenticeships](http://www.ucas.com/alternatives/apprenticeships/apprenticeships-england/what-apprenticeships-are-available/degree-apprenticeships)

## WORK & TRAINING

### Apprenticeships

#### Advantages:

- Most of your time will be spent working, and learning job-specific skills
- The skills and knowledge you learn will be used to gain professional qualifications
- You will be supported by a specialist learning provider
- You will be paid for your time in work

#### Disadvantages:

- You need to be sure that you choose the right apprenticeship for you because the skills you learn will be job-specific
- Competition for apprenticeships can be high and so it is important to have back-up options

To find apprenticeships visit [www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship](http://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship)

### Vocational qualifications

Vocational qualifications are practical learning programmes for specific job roles or employment sectors.

#### Advantages:

- There are lots of vocational qualifications to choose from such as engineering, health care, ICT, business and art
- They are offered at certain colleges
- You will learn the knowledge and skills required to perform a particular job
- Your qualification will act as proof that you are trained for that particular job

#### Disadvantages:

- You need to be sure that you choose the right vocational course for you as you will develop job-specific skills and knowledge
- You will have to spend a significant amount of time doing classroom-based activities at college

## FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO GET A JOB OR APPRENTICESHIP?

If you're currently out of work you might want to consider traineeships and volunteering. With both you'll gain work experience as well as learning lots of transferable skills such as team work, organisation and leadership – attributes which are valuable to employers.

### Traineeships

A traineeship is an education and training programme. It includes work experience. It can last anywhere between 6 weeks and 6 months. They are aimed at young people aged 16-24 who do not have a Level 3 qualification.

#### Advantages:

- You could gain the skills and experience that employers are looking for
- They often include help with writing CVs and preparing for interviews
- You may get a job interview at the end of your traineeship if a role becomes available in the company

#### Disadvantages:

- They're unpaid

To find out more about traineeship opportunities visit 'Find a traineeship' [www.gov.uk/find-traineeship](http://www.gov.uk/find-traineeship)

### Volunteering

Being a volunteer can be a great way to make a real difference in your local community and can also give your CV a boost.

#### Advantages:

- You can try out different types of work to get a taster
- You will learn valuable skills which you can add to your CV
- It's a great way of filling the gap while you are looking for jobs

#### Disadvantages:

- It is unpaid



# AM I DISABLED?



## AM I DISABLED?

ADHD is a recognised medical condition and if you are diagnosed with ADHD you have the right to claim that you have a disability.

### SHOULD I TELL PEOPLE THAT I AM DISABLED?

Depending on how severe your symptoms of ADHD are and how much they affect your daily life, you may want to tell your teacher or boss that you have a disability.

There are often support schemes for students and employees to help you overcome some of the specific difficulties that you may face.

### WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS?

People with disabilities are protected from discrimination through disability rights made under The Equality Act 2010.

The rights cover most areas including:

- Employment
- Education
- Dealing with the police

For more information visit [www.gov.uk/rights-disabled-person](http://www.gov.uk/rights-disabled-person)

### FUNDING AND BENEFITS

Depending on your circumstances, you may be eligible for government benefits whilst you study, train or look for work.

Visit [www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org) or ask for an appointment to speak to a benefits advisor at your local council offices or job centre.

# WHERE CAN I FIND ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?

# WHERE CAN I FIND ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?

There's a lot of information and support available for people with ADHD - you just need to know where to look. To get you started, we've listed some useful resources below.

Do your research. Involve other people. Discuss your thoughts, feelings and findings with friends, family, teachers or your healthcare professional.

## INFORMATION ABOUT ADHD

ADDISS – The National Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Services

[www.addiss.co.uk](http://www.addiss.co.uk)

Living with ADHD – A website packed full of information about ADHD, where to find support and hints and tips about dealing with ADHD. Provided by Janssen-Cilag Limited

[www.livingwithadhd.co.uk](http://www.livingwithadhd.co.uk)

The UK ADHD Partnership (UKAP) – A great website that provides lots of information on ADHD and where to find support

[www.ukadhd.com](http://www.ukadhd.com)

## INFORMATION ABOUT PLANNING YOUR FUTURE

Pathways and options for study and work

[www.careerpilot.org.uk](http://www.careerpilot.org.uk)

UK Government information about apprenticeships

[www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships](http://www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships)

Different graduate careers, postgraduate study, advice about work experience and internship opportunities

[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

Independent careers advice bridging the gap from learning to employment

[www.careerconnect.org.uk](http://www.careerconnect.org.uk)



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