



ADHD and Leading a Balanced Life

1. ADHD: Leading a Balanced Life

FOCUS on Sleep



For many people, ADHD leads to having trouble applying daily routines, including morning and bedtime preparation. Recent studies have shown that ADHD is often associated with sleep problems at every age!

There are several reasons that people with ADHD often have difficulty going to bed and falling asleep:

- ☑ Nighttime is an ideal moment to make up for lost time or to enjoy the evening.
 - ☑ Hyperfocused, scattered or distracted, people with ADHD do not see time passing . . . until it is too late or very late in the day.
 - ☑ When their heads hit the pillow, racing thoughts and hyperactivity keep them from falling asleep.
- Trouble going to bed at night affects their ability to get up in the morning and leads to a disrupted circadian rhythm. Scientists call this phenomenon “a delayed sleep phase.” Yet, people’s family, school or work lives require them to get up early. This leads to a chronic lack of sleep, in itself a risk factor for greater concentration problems, irritability and even overweight in the long run.



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Dr. Annick Vincent (Revised: July 2014)

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Did You Know?

Dusk prepares your brain to fall asleep by stimulating the secretion of a hormone: melatonin.



Bright lights block this effect.

- ☑ To make it easier to fall asleep, reduce light sources at the end of the evening because they stimulate the brain and emit the signal that it is still daytime.
- ☑ Conversely, bright lights in the morning promote wakefulness.

- Studies have shown that taking melatonin (in the form of a capsule) one to two hours before bedtime can help regulate your circadian rhythm. However, there is no information on its long-term use. It is therefore recommended to use it sporadically rather than on a constant basis. *Beware: Melatonin capsules lose their effectiveness if exposed to light, so keep them in an airtight bottle. 😊*

Good sleep is essential.

Here are a few tips for people who feel sleepy but fight against sleep:

- ✓ Consciously decide to go to bed earlier even if you have to set an alarm clock as a reminder. 😊
- ✓ Turn off all screens and all other sources of stimulation one hour before bedtime.
- ✓ Do activities that relax you and promote sleepiness.
 - Some people need calm, so they either read or do active relaxation activities (e.g., progressive muscle relaxation, abdominal breathing, meditation or mindfulness).
 - Others need to get rid of their surplus energy and believe that physical activity helps them sleep better.
 - Each of us is different, so we need to find our own balance.





For people who have chronic sleep problems:

- ✓ Avoid taking naps during the day and get up early no matter how bad your night was.
- ✓ Wait until you feel sleepy before going to bed.
- ✓ Get up and do a neutral activity if you haven't fallen asleep within 20 minutes.
- ✓ Reserve your bed for sleep (and sex).
- ✓ Ban reading, TV, computers and other screens from the bedroom.
- ✓ Do some form of physical activity during the day!

If your sleep problems persist, talk to your doctor. Some medical conditions can affect your sleep (e.g., sleep apnea, anxiety disorder, depression).



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FOCUS on Nutrition



Eating well is a daily challenge for many people with ADHD.

Hyperactive children have trouble staying put at the table. They squirm around in their seats and wolf down their food or else start daydreaming and the meal goes on forever. Adults with ADHD often have difficulty planning their meals, don't feel hungry until their hunger is intense, eat quickly, often irregularly and impulsively, and also skip meals.

Canada's Food Guide illustrates what healthy eating is.

- ☑ There is no special diet for ADHD, unless certain foods are not tolerated well.
- ☑ The scientific literature is not clear on the impact of food dyes.
- ☑ Be careful about using stimulants such as coffee and energy drinks.
- ☑ Nutritional supplements, such as omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids (e.g., Equazen Eye Q), have been shown to be more effective than placebo in a few studies. They may be added to ADHD treatments, but they are not a substitute for medication.
- Keeping some basic ingredients on hand, finding fast and easy recipes to make, varying your menus and taking the time to eat, even in the morning, are win-win solutions. Each person must find the solutions that best suit them.
- ❖ Not hungry for a regular meal?
 - ✓ Eat smaller portions.
 - ✓ Increase your calorie intake.
 - ✓ Consider a liquid meal (e.g., instant breakfast powder, protein smoothies or hearty soups).
- ❖ Forget to eat?
 - ✓ Make meals a part of your schedule even if you have to set an alarm clock to remember to take a meal break.



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FOCUS on the Use of Electronics

ADHD and Electronics: Friends or Foes?

Electronic media can be a good source of information, networking and even daily planning (e.g., digital planners), but entertainment can quickly become a major distraction:

- ☑ Social networks are a significant source of distraction during the day.
- ☑ People with ADHD can become hyper-absorbed in searching the Web, playing electronic games or passively watching TV.
- ☑ People with ADHD can spend a lot of time in front of their screens, which reduces their time for physical activity.



ADHD and Leading a Balanced Life

FOCUS on Physical Activity



Get moving to clear your thoughts!

Doing an intense, aerobic physical activity on a regular basis promotes better brain function in everyone, whether or not they have ADHD. We therefore need to find ways to reduce our screen time and discover activities that get us moving!

- ✓ Look for stimulating and fun activities (reduces the likelihood of quitting!).
- ✓ Group or individual sports?
- ✓ No need to be an Olympic champ!
- ✓ Every little step counts and adds up.
- ✓ The important thing is to give it a try, jump into it and keep at it.

If your ADHD symptoms appear while you are practising a sport, mention this to your trainer. The trainer may interpret your fidgeting or distractibility as a lack of interest. Just as teachers can change their classroom teaching methods, trainers can also adapt their techniques to suit ADHD.

- ❖ Several high-level athletes have ADHD. In Canada, those who take ADHD medication must check if they need to receive authorization from the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES, www.cces.ca).

Watch out for high-risk activities!

- Some hyperactive people are so committed to physical activity that they are unable to slow down even when injured, which hinders the healing process.
- Impulsive-hyperactive people driven by strong sensations often neglect the safety aspects and are at greater risk of injury. Protective equipment is good for everybody, even the most highly skilled!

Fidgeting without bothering others?

Here are a few options to try (see the **Gadgets** proposed in the Tips section, www.attentiondeficit-info.com, www.cliniquefocus.com):

- Hum a song in your head.
- Doodle or draw.
- Contract-relax your muscles while staying in place.
- Manipulate a non-noisy object (e.g., stress ball, tangle).
- Sit on a moving stool or chair or an exercise ball.
- Put a heavy object on your shoulders or thighs (e.g., a stuffed animal).
- Take breaks to stretch your muscles.

5. ADHD and Leading a Balanced Life

– Resources–

Restorative sleep, a healthy diet and physical activity are essential for good brain function.

For people with ADHD, applying strategies aimed at leading a healthy life is often challenging and difficult to initiate and maintain, but incredibly effective in the long run!

Ready, set, go!

Suggested Readings

- *Canada's Food Guide.*
- Morin, C. (paper version 1996, ebook 2011) *Relief from Insomnia: Getting the Sleep of Your Dreams*, Pennsylvania: Broadway Books
- Ratey John J. (2008) *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, New York: Little, Brown and Company.
- Rotz R & Wright SD. (2005) *Fidget to Focus: Outwit Your Boredom: Sensory Strategies for Living with ADD*, Lincoln: IUUniverse.
- Vincent, A. (2013). *Mt brain Still Needs Glasses*, Montréal: Quebec Livres.



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