

TAKING CHARGE OF ADULT ADHD



**A foremost expert
shows how you can:**

- Succeed at Work
- Develop Good Relationships
- Handle Your Finances
- Maintain a Healthy Lifestyle

Author of the bestselling Taking Charge of ADHD

RUSSELL A. BARKLEY, PhD
with Christine M. Benton

Praise for
Taking Charge of Adult ADHD

“Consider this book the Rosetta Stone of adult ADHD. No one but Dr. Barkley could translate the sophisticated grasp of ADHD for which he is well known into lay terms and solutions. Comprehensive, immensely practical, highly readable, and wholly compassionate, *Taking Charge of Adult ADHD* is the definitive guide for adults with ADHD and the people who care about them.”

—*Gina Pera, author of Is It You, Me, or Adult A.D.D.?*

“This wonderful book presents information and sharp clinical insights accrued over decades of work by a preeminent leader in the field. Dr. Barkley clearly and thoughtfully discusses the causes of adult ADHD and how to get diagnosed and treated. He offers many self-help strategies that readers can start using immediately.”

—*Lenard Adler, MD, author of Scattered Minds*

“Dr. Barkley’s advice to individuals who have ADHD (or think they might) represents a remarkable blend of science and practicality. This book offers a lifeline to adults with ADHD and their families.”

—*Michael Gordon, PhD, Director, ADHD Program,
Department of Psychiatry, State University of New York
Upstate Medical University*

“This book will surely become a classic. If you are an adult with ADHD, Dr. Barkley can help you make sense of your lifelong struggles and develop a clear roadmap for overcoming them. Stories and examples from others facing the same challenges bring Dr. Barkley’s ideas to life. I will certainly recommend this easy-to-read yet scientifically based book to everyone who comes through our adult ADHD clinic.”

—*J. Russell Ramsay, PhD, Codirector, Adult ADHD
Treatment and Research Program,
University of Pennsylvania*

**TAKING
CHARGE**
OF ADULT ADHD

RUSSELL A. BARKLEY, PhD
with Christine M. Benton



*To my new grandson, Liam Stephen Barkley,
a new light and love in my life*

—R. A. B.

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Introduction

This book is for you if:

✓ **You were diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as an adult.**

or

✓ **You were diagnosed as a child and still have symptoms.**

or

✓ **You think you might have ADHD because you have trouble ...**

- ⇒ Concentrating
- ⇒ Paying attention
- ⇒ Getting organized
- ⇒ Planning
- ⇒ Problem solving
- ⇒ Controlling your emotions

This book can help you if:

- ✓ **You want the scientific facts about what's wrong**
- ✓ **You want to find the best treatment.**
- ✓ **You want to learn strategies and skills to overcome your symptoms.**
- ✓ **You want to know how to play up your strengths.**

ADHD is real. And it's not a condition that affects only kids. I've spent more than 35 years treating, researching, and teaching others about ADHD. For most of those years, few people believed adults had ADHD. Now we know from closer study that as many as two-thirds of the children who have ADHD will still have it when they grow up. This means 4–5% of all adults have ADHD. **That's more than 11 million adults in the United States alone.**

If you're among them—or you think you might be—this book is for you. I wrote it because I think you should reap the benefit of everything we've learned from decades of research. ADHD is probably among the most extensively studied of all mental or emotional disorders. In fact, the information and advice in this book is based on *more than 7,000* research studies on this disorder that have been published over the last century.

We've arrived at a very good understanding of what ADHD is. We know a lot about how it affects the brain. We have a clearer view than ever of how and why the symptoms make your daily life seem like one long uphill climb.

Best of all, we have treatments that are so effective that many adults end up feeling as if the playing field has been leveled for them for the first time ever. You'll learn about them in the following pages. And based on a theory I've developed about the nature of ADHD, this book also offers you a collection of strategies that can turn your life around at work, at home, in college, and with your family and friends. These strategies are based on a scientific understanding of what's behind your symptoms, and they can help you be successful everywhere it's important to you. It's only what you deserve.

Step One

TO GET STARTED, GET EVALUATED

“Time escapes me, and I can’t deal with it effectively like other adults.”

“My mind and my life are a jumbled mess. I often can’t seem to organize my work or other activities anywhere near as well as the other adults I know.”

“I know that I flit from one thing to another and one project to another, and it drives the people I have to work with crazy. But I have to do things as soon as I think of them, because if I don’t, I’ll forget about them, and then they never get done.”

“As a kid, I was always the one who had a hard time sitting still and had all of this energy and no clue what to do with it. I always felt like an outcast, and I hated it. I remember having to go to the nurse’s office every day to take my meds—it was the worst feeling! No one wanted to be friends with me because I did not fit in with the group. I will never be the quiet, calm, reserved girl in the crowd. I am that outgoing, sometimes loud (OK, more often than I would like to admit), intense, somewhat nerdy, sarcastic, funny girl that suddenly everyone likes to be around.”

“So here is what happened last weekend that my wife is so upset about. I get out the lawn mower Saturday morning to cut the grass. But the gas can is empty. So I throw it in my Ford Explorer and drive down to the quickie mart for gas, and while I am filling up the can, a best friend pulls in to fill up. He’s as much an addict about trout fishing as I am. And he says he has an extra pole and waders, so why don’t we hit the stream for a little fishing. So I say ‘yeah’ and get into his car and leave mine at the gas station. We fish for an hour or so, and then we’re thirsty and hit this great little bar that guys love to hang out at and have a beer. It’s now three in the afternoon, and I finally get back to the gas station for my car, and the state police are there. You see, my wife called them when I didn’t return home after several hours from getting the gas for the mower, thinking something bad had happened to me. She was so furious with me when she found out what I had done that she wouldn’t talk to me for days! But that’s how I am—I just go with the flow of what’s happening around me and can’t remember what it was I was supposed to get done, or I just blow it off as less interesting than what I might have a chance to do.”

1 Is It Possible That You Have ADHD?

Do the experiences you just read about sound familiar? These are the voices of adults with ADHD. The first comment strikes at the very heart of what ADHD is. It's a succinct description of the serious time management problems that ADHD creates for adults in their daily lives.

Do you feel like you're often out of sync with the clock, with schedules and agendas? Always late or scattered or unsure what to do with the limited hours in your day? If so, you know it's no fun feeling like you're constantly letting yourself and others down by missing deadlines and appearing to stand people up for dates and appointments. You know it's hard to maintain a sense of adult accomplishment and competence when those around you think they can't count on you to get things done. Maybe it's time to change all that.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PROBLEMS?

Of course time management troubles aren't caused only by ADHD. But if you share some of the other problems described by the people above, ADHD might be the culprit. And if it is, there's a lot you can do to change your life for the better.

Quickly run through this list and check off each question you'd answer with a "yes."

- Do you have trouble concentrating?
- Are you easily distracted?
- Do you consider yourself highly impulsive?
- Do you have trouble getting or staying organized?
- Do you find yourself unable to think clearly?
- Do you feel like you always have to be busy doing lots of things—but then you don't finish most of them?
- Do people say you talk too much?
- Is it hard for you to listen closely to others?
- Do you jump in and interrupt others when they're talking or doing something—and then wish you had thought first?
- Does your voice seem to carry over everyone else's?
- Do you struggle to get to the point of what you're trying to say?
- Do you often feel restless inside?
- Do you find yourself forgetting things that need to get done but are not urgent?



You'll find a list of 91 additional symptoms associated with ADHD, gathered from a study we did over 7 years, in the

Only a professional evaluation can tell you for sure whether you have ADHD. But the more questions you answered “yes,” the more likely it is that you have this disorder. What I can tell you right now is that reams of scientific data show an association between complaints like these—and hundreds of similar ones—and ADHD in adults.

The data also tell us how severe the fallout can be. ADHD can make people spend the paycheck on something fun right now—and never save enough money for their monthly annual bill payments or for that vacation or car or house they’ll want even more tomorrow than the purchase that seemed irresistible today. It can make them bet it all on an investment that a little patience and research would have revealed as a bad risk. It can make you say and do all kinds of things you later regret. Sound familiar?

But, you might be thinking, I can’t possibly have ADHD. I’m not hyperactive! My brother (or sister, nephew, childhood pal, classmate) had ADHD when we were kids, and he was constantly fidgety, restless, and “hyper,” always acting out in some embarrassing way. *I’m not like that.*

 You don’t have to be hyperactive to have adult ADHD.

One of the things we’re beginning to understand well about adult ADHD is that hyperactivity is seen more in kids with the disorder—but then it usually declines substantially by adolescence and adulthood. Often the only thing that’s left of hyperactivity in adults with ADHD is that feeling of restlessness and the need to keep busy that you may know well.



What we know about adults with ADHD comes straight from scientific fact:

- Data since 1991 from the University of Massachusetts Medical School, where one of the first clinics in the United States for adults with ADHD was established
- Evidence from a study of 158 children with ADHD (and 81 without it) followed into adulthood, one of the largest such studies ever done

If you think you might have ADHD, there are good reasons to seek an evaluation:

- ✓ *We’re coming up with lots of answers that could help you.* Adult ADHD is becoming well understood by science even though the disorder hasn’t been recognized in adults for that long.
- ✓ *This disorder can hurt you more than a lot of other psychological problems—and it can hurt you every day, everywhere you go.* ADHD is more limiting in more areas of adult life than most other disorders seen in outpatient mental health clinics.
- ✓ *And there’s a lot more help, in the form of effective treatment options and coping strategies, than for a lot of other disorders that affect adults.* ADHD is one of the most treatable psychological disorders.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU HAD THESE PROBLEMS?


If you think about how long you've been struggling to manage your time, to concentrate, and to control your impulses, would you say it's been just weeks or months or more like years? Picture yourself as a child: Were you dealing with any of the same problems then? Do you remember also having trouble sitting still in school? Finishing a hobby project? Following the rules on a playing field?

The adults with ADHD that I've studied, diagnosed, and treated have varying memories of the types of problems you checked off earlier. Many were not diagnosed as kids. Sometimes their pediatrician didn't believe ADHD was real. Or their parents didn't think "being hyper" or not being able to focus was a reason to take a child to the doctor," as one man diagnosed in his mid-twenties reported. These people may have bought the myth that there was nothing wrong with them that sheer willpower wouldn't cure. Sometimes people end up undiagnosed because they fall into a gray area between ADHD and non-ADHD symptoms or because they had other problems that muddled the picture.


Going undiagnosed as a child doesn't mean you don't have ADHD.

Having less severe problems managing time, concentrating, and controlling impulses than you did as a child doesn't mean you don't have ADHD.

Being hyperactive as a child but not as an adult doesn't mean you don't have ADHD.

 Having sudden, short-term symptoms usually rules out ADHD.

But not having any ADHD symptoms as a child probably does mean you don't have ADHD. ADHD-like symptoms that arose only in adulthood or that haven't been going on for very long are probably being caused by something else—a brain injury or other physical illness, for example.

 Of all cases of ADHD we've diagnosed in our various clinics and studies, 98% started before age 16.

If you don't clearly remember having the same problems you just noted when you were a child, is there someone who knew you well then that you can ask? A parent? Brother or sister? Ironically, the same problems that make it hard for people with ADHD to get things done on time, make wise choices, and even get along with others can make it tough for them to trace their own history accurately—at least until they've reached approximately their mid- to late 20s. I'll explain why in Step Two.

I didn't have any problems as a child, and I haven't had any brain injuries. Isn't it possible that ADHD hasn't caused me any problems till now because of my intelligence? I scored high on IQ tests in elementary school.

Except in school and possibly at work, intelligence is unlikely to protect you from experiencing impairments. Intelligence is not the only factor involved in domains like family and social functioning, driving, crime and drug use, dating and marital relationships, and, in fact, most others. High intelligence wouldn't necessarily have protected you in these areas if you had ADHD symptoms. Sudden appearance of problems in adulthood is highly likely to be caused by something other than ADHD.



Children and teens with ADHD that I've followed up into adulthood often don't know the extent of their own symptoms or how much those symptoms are interfering with their life. It's not until 27–32 years of age that adults with ADHD become more consistent in what they say about themselves relative to what others say about them.



I think I may have ADHD now even though I didn't have any concentration or other problems when I was younger. Maybe I was just compensating for my ADHD in other ways?

In our research, the average number of major life activities in which adults with ADHD said they were often impaired was 6 or 7 out of 10. ADHD causes serious impairment across all the domains of adult life, from education to work to family. It would be nearly impossible to make it through childhood, adolescence, and even early adulthood by “compensating” somehow. Most professionals would have a hard time accepting the idea that ADHD had not interfered with a person's functioning until adulthood without strong evidence that parents and schools had made extraordinary efforts to help. ADHD is defined by lack of compensation during the childhood years—not by successful compensation during those years!



Symptoms must have lasted for at least 6 months to be considered in diagnosing ADHD.


WHAT ARE YOUR SYMPTOMS?

Only a qualified professional can help you fully answer that question. Still, checking off any of the following questions that you'd answer “yes” will help you figure out whether to pursue a diagnostic evaluation. In our research aimed specifically at understanding adult ADHD, we've found the following nine criteria most accurate in identifying the disorder.

Do you often ...

- Easily get distracted by extraneous stimuli or irrelevant thoughts?
- Make decisions impulsively?
- Have difficulty stopping activities or behavior when you should do so?
- Start a project or task without reading or listening to directions carefully?
- Fail to follow through on promises or commitments you make to others?

- Have trouble doing things in their proper order or sequence?
- Drive much faster than others—or, if you don't drive, have difficulty engaging in leisure activities or doing fun things quietly?
- Have difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or recreational activities?
- Have difficulty organizing tasks and activities?

 Information on finding a professional to evaluate you is in [Chapter 3](#).




The fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV), published by the American Psychiatric Association, uses 18 symptoms to diagnose ADHD—9 focusing on inattention and 9 on hyperactivity–impulsivity. But that list (see the Appendix) was developed for use with children only. My associates and I have compiled research data showing that the list of 9 symptoms above is more useful with adults. A research colleague of mine, Stephen Faraone, PhD, has done an independent study with his own groups of adults showing that these symptoms were very good at identifying those having ADHD.

Did you check off four of the first seven symptoms on this list, or six of all nine symptoms? If so, you are highly likely to have ADHD. In that case you should seek an evaluation from a qualified and experienced mental health professional if you have not done so already.

HOW DO THESE SYMPTOMS AFFECT YOUR LIFE?

ADHD is not a category that you either fall into or don't. It is not like pregnancy. It's more like human height or intelligence. Think of it as a dimension, with different people falling at different points along it.

So where on that dimension is the division between “disorder” and “no disorder”? It's where impairment in a major life activity occurs. *Symptoms* are the ways a disorder expresses itself in thoughts and actions. *Impairments* are the adverse consequences that result from showing those symptoms. The table below lists typical impairments caused by ADHD in childhood and beyond.

 Step Five gives specific strategies for preventing ADHD symptoms from causing the impairments listed in the table.

Typical childhood impairments	Typical adolescent and adult impairments
Family stress and conflict	Poor functioning at work
Poor peer relationships	Frequent job changes
Few or no close friendships	Risky sexual behavior/increased teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases

Disruptive behavior in stores, church, and other community settings to the extent that you are asked to leave or not return	Unsafe driving (speeding, frequent accidents)
Low regard for personal safety/increased accidental injuries	Difficulties managing finances (impulsive spending, excessive use of credit cards, poor debt repayment, little or no savings, etc.)
Slow development of self-care	Problems in dating or marital relationships
Slow development of personal responsibility	<i>Less common but notable:</i>
Significantly lower than average school performance	Antisocial activities (lying, stealing, fighting) that lead to frequent police contact, arrests, and even time in jail; often associated with a greater risk for illegal drug use and abuse
Significantly fewer years of schooling	Generally less healthy lifestyle (less exercise; more sedentary self-entertainment, such as video games, TV, surfing the Internet; obesity, binge eating or bulimia, poorer nutrition; greater use of nicotine and alcohol), and consequently an increased risk for coronary heart disease

WHAT'S NEXT?

Now you should have a fairly good idea of whether you might have ADHD and should consider a professional evaluation:

- Do you have at least four to six of the nine symptoms now?
- Do they occur often in your current life?
- Have you been having these troubles for at least 6 months?
- Did they develop in childhood or adolescence (before 16 years of age)?
- Have your current symptoms resulted in adverse consequences (impairment) in one or more major domains (education, work, social relationships, dating or marital relationships, managing your money, driving, etc.)?
- Did you experience adverse consequences from these symptoms in childhood?

If you can answer “yes” to all of these questions, there is a high probability that you have ADHD. Read on to find out what you can do about it.

2 Can You Handle the Problem on Your Own?

Believing you might have ADHD can feel like a huge relief: At last you have some idea why your life has been so tough. Problem solved, right? All you have to do now is read a couple books like this one so you know how to deal with the deficits ADHD imposes.

Not so fast. There are some very powerful reasons to get professional help, both for diagnosis and for treatment. This chapter will explain in more depth what one man in his 30s put so plainly:

“I’ve tried extremely hard over the past few decades to deal with my ADHD on my own and for the most part I’ve done OK. But now I think I need some help. I’m tired of being a ‘skipping stone’ as far as my career goes and would really like to settle and excel as I KNOW I can.”

In brief, these are the reasons to get professional help:

- ✓ To make sure your symptoms aren’t being caused by a condition other than ADHD that requires attention
- ✓ To discover whether your problems are being caused by a combination of ADHD and another condition
- ✓ To get the prescription medication that’s proven to give a huge boost to copying efforts if you do receive a diagnosis of ADHD
- ✓ To find out where your strengths and weaknesses are so you can aim your copying efforts exactly where they’re needed

All great reasons to form a relationship with a doctor who can prescribe the right treatment for you.

Convinced? If so, feel free to turn directly to [Chapter 3](#). But if you need to know more about why you should not try to handle this problem alone, read the rest of this chapter.

ARE YOUR SYMPTOMS BEING CAUSED BY SOMETHING ELSE, LIKE A MEDICAL PROBLEM?

Let’s go back to the idea that knowing you might have ADHD can be a relief. We’ve found that finding a name and a neurobiological reason for many of your struggles is, in itself, therapeutic. When you know what’s wrong, you can stop beating yourself up for not being able to just shake off your problems. But you can’t truly know you have ADHD without the evaluation. Only a seasoned mental health professional has the training and judgment to apply the diagnostic criteria you learned about in [Chapter 1](#). Without that kind of background, you won’t be able to factor in the nuances that define the line between signs of ADHD and symptoms that can be found to lesser degrees in the general population of adults. Nor will you be familiar with the other psychological and psychiatric disorders that cause

problems with attention, concentration, and working memory so that you can distinguish between those and ADHD.

➔ Wouldn't it be an even bigger relief to *know* you have ADHD than to just *guess*?

Just as important, a qualified professional can direct you to any medical tests or procedures you need to ensure that your symptoms are not a result of brain injury or illness, as noted in [Chapter 1](#).

DOES ADHD EXPLAIN EVERYTHING YOU'RE GOING THROUGH?

Even if [Chapter 1](#) gave you a strong feeling that you have ADHD, you need a professional evaluation to make sure ADHD tells the whole story. It would be incredibly demoralizing to address ADHD and still struggle because some other problem has gone undiscovered and untreated. If an evaluation turns up coexisting disorders (called comorbidity), you'll be given not only a diagnosis and some information about your disorder(s) but also a list of treatment recommendations—the first step on your way to leaving behind your life as a “skipping stone.”



Most adults with ADHD have at least two disorders: 80–85% have ADHD and one other disorder, and more than half may have three psychological disorders.

Other Disorders That Commonly Co-Occur with ADHD

- Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD)
- Conduct disorder (CD; aggression, delinquency, truancy, etc.)
- Learning disabilities (delays in reading, spelling, math, writing, etc.)
- Childhood- or adolescent-onset bipolar disorder
- Adult antisocial personality
- Alcoholism and other addictions
- Tic disorders or the more severe Tourette syndrome (multiple motor and vocal tics)
- Autism spectrum disorders

THE MOST EFFECTIVE TREATMENT—MEDICATION—REQUIRES A DOCTOR'S PRESCRIPTION

You can read all about the medications used to treat ADHD in Step Three. What's important to know right now is that where ADHD symptoms are concerned, *medication works*. Medication improves the symptoms. It is effective in a large percentage of adults—fewer than 10% will have *no* positive response to any of the drugs approved for use with ADHD. Medication even seems to temporarily correct or compensate for the underlying neurological problems that are likely contributing to the ADHD in the first place.



The success rate for ADHD medications is probably unrivaled by any other treatment for any other disorder in psychiatry.

A lot of other treatments and coping methods have little effect unless the person with ADHD is also taking medication. In our experience, adults with ADHD who choose not to take medication following their diagnosis typically return within 3–6 months asking to go on medication once they realize that all the other options are not addressing their problems very well.



Studies show that ADHD medications can:

- *Normalize* the behavior of 50–65% of those with ADHD
- *Substantially improve* the behavior of another 20–30% of people with the disorder

EXACTLY WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?

A professional evaluation involves several steps. These steps are designed to look at your difficulties from a number of angles to make sure important facts aren't overlooked or significantly misinterpreted. But if the process seems repetitive or drawn out to you, keep in mind that the evaluator is trying to rule out things that are not causing you problems as well as identifying what is causing you trouble. There's another reason to be patient with this process too: differentiating among all the possible causes of your symptoms, the practitioner will also be unearthing valuable information about your personal strengths. Knowing where you shine in life skills and natural abilities will help you and your therapist choose coping strategies that are tailored to help you most. Artistic talents and engaging personalities, for instance, don't come from having ADHD, but you can learn to use these gifts to compensate for ADHD symptoms. Or you can identify a career path that draws on these strengths.

I've met many representatives for pharmaceutical companies, for example, who have ADHD but are outstanding in their work. The job allows them to travel extensively and meet with lots of different physicians and their office staff, keeping them engaged and on the go. A nine-to-five desk job might prove so boring that they would be hard-pressed to concentrate and stay motivated to succeed, despite their natural talent for salesmanship and customer relations. But the constant change of scene energizes and focuses these reps. Many also work in teams with other reps to cover a region, which gives their work some structure that would not be available to them in a solo sales position.

That's what the evaluation process is all about: finding out exactly what's wrong and what you have going for you so that a treatment plan can be designed to set you on the road to health and success as quickly as possible.

3 Where Can You Go to Get Help?

If you haven't yet had a diagnostic evaluation, you can seek a qualified mental health professional on your own. But if you have a good relationship with your primary care physician, a call to this doctor might be a fruitful first step. A doctor who knows you well can use screening questionnaires to determine whether you're right to think you could have ADHD. If the doctor can rule out physical causes for your symptoms, you've spared yourself the separate medical exam that a mental health evaluator might recommend. And a physician who knows you well may be able to refer you to an ADHD specialist who is likely to be a good fit for you. In my experience, when you like and trust your doctor, you have a good chance of feeling the same way about anyone the doctor recommends.

HOW TO FIND A PROFESSIONAL WHO IS EXPERIENCED WITH ADHD

Any of the following could be a good source of referrals. If one doesn't pan out for you, try one of the others.

- ✓ As mentioned above, you might start by calling your primary care provider (internist, family practitioner, or general practitioner) to ask for the name of a specialist in your area who is working in adult ADHD.
- ✓ Call the state psychiatric association or psychological association. The state associations usually keep lists of their professionals, organized by specialty. See if they have any who are listed as experts focusing on ADHD in adults.



Go to www.psych.org or www.apa.org to find your state's psychiatric or psychological association.



Website for Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD): www.chadd.org.

Website for Attention Deficit Disorder Association (ADDA): www.add.org.

A partial list of U.S. institutions that have adult ADHD clinics is in the Resources at the back of the book.

- ✓ Check the website of one of the major nonprofit organizations dedicated to ADHD: CHADD for the United States and ADDA for the United States and other English-speaking countries. If either one has a support group or chapter in your area, call and ask if they know of any adult ADHD clinical experts in your area.
- ✓ Call the local university medical school psychiatry department. Even if it's not nearby, they can usually direct you to the practitioners they know in your area who do adult ADHD evaluations.

- ✓ Call the local hospital psychiatry department for the same information.

- ✓ Call the local university psychology clinic for the same information.
- ✓ Call the county mental health center (usually listed in your phone book under “county government”).
- ✓ Check the yellow pages for psychiatrists and psychologists specializing in adult ADHD.
- ✓ Do you have a friend or relative you trust who is being treated for adult ADHD? If so, ask for a referral to that person’s practitioner. Or if you know someone whose child is being treated for ADHD, you might ask for the child’s doctor’s name and call that clinician to see if he or she treats adults or knows someone who does.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

If you’re lucky enough to have a number of specialists to choose from in your area, you can ask the following questions when you call to inquire about an evaluation. In fact, you might want to ask these questions even if you’ve located only one professional nearby:

- ✓ What percentage of the doctor’s practice is made up of people with ADHD (compared to other disorders)?
- ✓ If the practitioner sees both adults and children, what percentage are adults?
- ✓ How long has the doctor been treating adults with ADHD?
- ✓ What is the practitioner’s area of specialization in medicine or psychology? Fields that cover ADHD and related psychiatric disorders include psychiatry, clinical psychology, neuropsychology, and neurology (especially behavioral).
- ✓ Is the practitioner board certified in this area of specialization? Board certification is a higher level of certification than a state license to practice medicine or psychology.
- ✓ How long will it take to get an appointment? (This may be significant to you if you have a number of professionals to choose from and would like to be seen as soon as possible.)
- ✓ Does the doctor treat people after diagnosing them? If not, where are patients referred for treatment?
- ✓ Are other potential resources available nearby? Most mental health practitioners will not have coaching, skills training, support groups, and the like on site, but psychologists in private practice often rent space in office parks where related professionals work, and they all refer patients to each other.
- ✓ How does the doctor charge, and what insurance plans does he or she accept?

4 What Do You Need for the Evaluation?

When you know what to expect, the evaluation process is likely to proceed more smoothly and quickly.

PREPARE BY KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT TO TAKE ALONG

Here are the typical elements in a diagnostic evaluation:

- ✓ Collection of rating scales and referral information before or during the evaluation
- ✓ An interview with you
- ✓ A review of previous records that may document your impairments
- ✓ Psychological testing to rule out general cognitive delay or learning disabilities
- ✓ Interviews with others who know you well to corroborate your reports
- ✓ A general medical examination when medication might be part of your treatment or if coexisting medical conditions need to be evaluated (if your physician hasn't already done this)

What you can take along to facilitate these steps:

- ✓ Any records you have or can collect in advance from schools you attended and from physicians and mental health professionals you've seen, any driving and criminal records, and any other documentation of problems that could be related to ADHD or another disorder
- ✓ The names of a few people who know you well and whom you trust to speak honestly and objectively with the evaluators
- ✓ Results of a medical exam if you've already had one from your physician
- ✓ A list of family members with mental disorders you know about
- ✓ A description of impairments during childhood and adolescence, as well as more recent ones

TAKE ALONG AN OPEN MIND

You've made this appointment because you want answers: Why can't you get done what adults need to do? Why do you keep struggling despite huge efforts to "buckle down" and succeed? What will it take for you to be able to reach important personal and professional goals? To provide these answers, the clinician you've made an appointment with has to gather a lot of information from a lot of sources. You may question the need for all of it. You might feel restless in the middle of the evaluation, eager to get it over with. Try to stay

focused on the goal—answers and solutions—and remember that the most important thing to take to your evaluation appointment is **an open mind**.

 Be prepared for the initial evaluation appointment to take several hours.

Go along with requests for school and other records, even though your academic history may be the last thing you want to revisit. Answer questions about impairment as honestly as you can. Be open to letting the evaluator interview someone else who knows you well to get a helpful outside perspective. Every test, questionnaire, and interview included in the evaluation has a scientific basis and is designed to provide the most reliable answers that the field of psychology can deliver.

With all these tests, rating scales, questionnaires, past records, and interviews, the psychologist knows everything there is to know about me. Why does she need to talk to one of my relatives too?

The short answer is that there's strength in numbers. The more different sources the evaluator can use to confirm your symptoms and the impairment you've suffered, the firmer the conclusions that can be drawn. That's why the evaluator doesn't just talk to you; she also uses scientifically devised rating scales and other tools to come at the information from as many angles as possible.

But even with all these tools, the evaluator is getting all the input from you. The fact is that adults (and children) with ADHD often report doing better on certain tasks than outside observation and objective measurements reveal. Driving is a particularly common example. You may very well believe you're just as good a driver as anyone else (or even better than average). You might feel those speeding tickets you've piled up were unfair, written by a police officer who was prejudiced against you or just trying to fill his quota for the month. Fender benders you've had may seem like they were caused by the other driver, who wasn't paying enough attention or who was too hesitant and therefore sent you misleading signals. And all those parking tickets because you just didn't have time to find a legal spot—we all get those, don't they? Someone who knows you well and—this is essential—is on your corner and wants to help you, not just criticize you, might be able to say that in fact you do drive much faster than most people, that it's your attention that sometimes drifts from the road, that you try to multitask or text message while driving, and that you get impatient easily when traffic backs up. On the surface it may feel like an intrusion, but try to believe that it is in your own best interests to let the professional speak about your concerns and your history with someone who knows you well, such as a parent, sibling, spouse or live-in partner, or close friend if family members are not available. Without this perspective, it might appear that you do not have ADHD when in fact you actually do have it, given the information that others can provide about you. Keep in mind that you're here to get answers—and accurate ones.

Why in the world would it matter that Aunt Ellen spent most of her life depressed? Why

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