

Self-Care for People with ADHD

100+ Ways to Recharge,
De-Stress, and Prioritize You!

Sasha Hamdani, MD
The ADHD Doctor, @thepsychdoctormd

Adams Media

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi



Adams Media

An Imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

100 Technology Center Drive
Stoughton, Massachusetts 02072

Copyright © 2023 by
Simon & Schuster, Inc.

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information address Adams Media Subsidiary Rights Department, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020.

First Adams Media hardcover edition
January 2023

ADAMS MEDIA and colophon are
trademarks of Simon & Schuster.

For information about special discounts
for bulk purchases, please contact
Simon & Schuster Special Sales
at 1-866-506-1949 or
business@simonandschuster.com.

The Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau
can bring authors to your live event. For
more information or to book an event
contact the Simon & Schuster Speakers
Bureau at 1-866-248-3049 or visit our
website at www.simonspeakers.com.

Interior design by Julia Jacintho
Interior images © 123RF/Sergey
Balakhnichev

Manufactured in the United States of
America

ScoutAutomatedPrintCode

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-
Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-1-5072-1943-0

ISBN 978-1-5072-1944-7 (ebook)

Many of the designations used by manufacturers and sellers to distinguish their products are claimed as trademarks. Where those designations appear in this book and Simon & Schuster, Inc., was aware of a trademark claim, the designations have been printed with initial capital letters.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information with regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional advice. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought.

—From a *Declaration of Principles* jointly adopted by a Committee of the American Bar Association and a Committee of Publishers and Associations

This book is intended as general information only, and should not be used to diagnose or treat any health condition. In light of the complex, individual, and specific nature of health problems, this book is not intended to replace professional medical advice. The ideas, procedures, and suggestions in this book are intended to supplement, not replace, the advice of a trained medical professional. Consult your physician before adopting any of the suggestions in this book, as well as about any condition that may require diagnosis or medical attention. The author and publisher disclaim any liability arising directly or indirectly from the use of this book.

Dedication

This book was a labor of love and the culmination of many confusing years of navigating through ADHD. I was assured no one reads these, so I can be as nauseatingly earnest as I want:

Thank you for the faith that carried me through dark, weird times and gave me something to hold on to. Thank you to both of my families for being constant supports and especially to my two baby birds for shining so much light into my life. Thank you to my medical school coordinator, Gladys, for hugging me when I needed it most. Thank you to my entire Banner family for gluing back my pieces and making me a physician. Thank you to my social media community for building such a beautiful, inspiring virtual world and allowing me to be my true, authentic self. Thank you to Radhika for being Radhika. And thank you to Leah, who plucked me from obscurity and gave me the golden chance to write this book.

If I think about it too much, I will definitely start crying. So, just thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Contents

Preface...7

Introduction...9

CHAPTER ONE

Emotional Self-Care...11

Find What You Are Grateful For...	12
Challenge Negative Thoughts	13
Allow Yourself to De-Mask	14
Notice Your Inner Experience.....	16
Don't Dwell On Lost Time	17
Write in a Journal	18
Listen to Music	20
Reframe Your Views about Failure	21
Express Yourself Through Poetry ...	22
Leave Behind the "Superpower"	
Rhetoric	24
Navigate Through Anxiety	25
Celebrate Your Small Wins.....	26
Make a Vision Board	28
Learn to Forgive Yourself.....	29
Reflect On Childhood ADHD ...	30
Recognize Your Triggers.....	32
Reflect On Positive Qualities and Strengths	33
Be Proactive about Depressive Episodes	34
Engage In a Social Justice Issue...	36
Don't Live in Denial	37
Control Your Anger.....	38
Recognize Emotional Dysregulation	40

CHAPTER TWO

Physical Self-Care...41

Hydrate	42
Practice Yoga	43
Find an Exercise You Like	44
Change Your Relationship with Medication.....	46
Take Your Vitamins.....	47
Take a Walk.....	48
Try a Headstand.....	50
Maintain Regular Doctor's Visits...	51
Modulate Caffeine Intake.....	52
How to Modulate Bingeing	54
Make Time for a Shower	55
Incorporate Good Sleep Hygiene...	56
Drink Some Green Tea	58
Get a Massage	59
Stop Smoking.....	60
Get an Appropriate Amount of Sunlight	62
Manage Sensory Overload.....	63
Have a Healthy Relationship with Sex	64
Curtail Alcohol Use.....	66
Learn How to Nourish Your Brain ...	67
Work In Good Dental Care	68
Dance It Out	69

CHAPTER THREE

Mental Self-Care...71

Understand Your Identity	72
Practice Deep Breathing	74
Practice Patience	75
Get a Therapist	76
Read a Book	78
Create Art	79
Use Social Media Therapeutically	80
Listen to a Podcast	82
Make Your Own Timeline	83
Manage Impostor Syndrome	84
Identify Rejection Sensitivity	86
Understand and Recognize Hyperfocus	87
Recognize and Acknowledge Feeling Overwhelmed	88
Calm Your Nervous System	90
Go Into Nature	91
Find the Humor in ADHD	92
Take a Nap	94
Utilize Therapeutic Distraction	95
Embrace Thinking Differently	96
Unplug from Technology	98
Treat Yourself Daily	99
Expect Lows after Highs	100

CHAPTER FOUR

Social Self-Care...101

Find a Like-Minded Community	102
Spend Time with a Pet	103
Dismantle ADHD Myths	104
Learn How to Handle Conflict	105
Help Educate Others about ADHD	107
Leave Time Between Commitments to Recalibrate ...	108
Reduce FOMO	109
Be Aware of Interrupting	111
Manage TMI	112
Cut Out Toxic People	113
Incorporate Hobbies Into Social Activity	115
Volunteer for Something Personally Meaningful	116
Communicate in Relationships ...	117
Cultivate Friendships	119
Learn to Say Sorry	120
Don't Gatekeep the Diagnosis	121
Create a Self-Care Culture in Your Circle	123
Explain ADHD to Loved Ones ...	124
Maneuver Difficult Conversations	125
Recognize Self-Sabotage in Relationships	127
Become Aware of "People Pleasing"	128

CHAPTER FIVE

Career/Professional Self-Care...129

Learn to Say No	130
Use Your PTO.....	132
List Career Goals.....	133
Learn to Actively Listen.....	134
Find a Body Double	136
Decide Whether to Disclose ADHD.....	137
Push Aside Perfectionism.....	138
Put Your Best Face Forward During Interviews	140
Ask for What You Want	141
Learn What Accommodations Are Available.....	142
Create a System for Paperwork ...	144
Bypass Analysis Paralysis.....	145
Don't Feel Chained to Conventional Careers	146
Embrace Challenges	148
Compensate for Poor Memory....	149
Manage Time Blindness	150
Manage Procrastination.....	152
Learn to Delegate.....	153
Learn to Prioritize.....	154
Counteract Restlessness	156
Arrange Your Workspace for Reward.....	157
Learn to Manage Long-Term Projects	158

CHAPTER SIX

Practical Self-Care...159

Understand Your Diagnosis	160
Find the Right Doctor	161
Learn the Different Players of Your Care Team	162
Ask for Help.....	164
Create a Budget	165
Do One Thing at a Time	166
Do What You Are Doing Now ...	168
Change Your Venue	169
Start Meal Planning	170
Take Something Off Your To-Do List	172
Keep Your ADHD in Mind While Traveling	173
Manage Impulsivity	174
Prevent Distracted Driving	176
Make Your Bed	177
Deal with the Mess!	178
Brain Dump Before Bed.....	180
Focus On Progress and Not Results	181
Shut Out Distraction.....	182
Start Habit Stacking	184
Plan Your Day the Night Before.....	185
Create a Uniform	186
Learn to Manage Boredom	187

Index...188

Preface

ADHD is a part of me. It is intrinsically woven into my DNA and is expressed in almost every facet of my life. My ADHD has grown with me and changed with new seasons in my life. It has made me realize that caring for myself and my well-being is inherently important and not something that I can push to the side or forget about. ADHD has challenged me but also propelled me to achieve things that I never thought were possible. And it is what led me to write this book.

My symptoms were first noticed in fourth grade in the form of a vivacious little girl who often had difficulty “settling down.” Even at that young age, I was acutely aware that I was capable of doing better but just didn’t know how. The teacher brought up these concerns to my parents. Days later, I was formally diagnosed with ADHD and started on medication. The difference was immediate. I sailed through school and began to truly enjoy learning. I knew that I wanted to go to medical school, but when I got there, I had to function independently without the support architecture that I had previously known. I felt disillusioned. My entire identity had been defined by academic success and that carefully cultivated image had shattered. It was then that I realized medication on its own wasn’t enough.

With a great deal of support, I was able to complete medical school and match into a psychiatry residency. *That* is where my journey changed. For the first time in my life, people *wanted* to talk about what was happening in my brain. In those safe surroundings, I realized that ADHD is not something to be fixed but rather is something to be managed. I had the time and the emotional space to distance myself from the chaos and slowly build organizational structures that

suited my brain. I began trying self-care activities to build my focus, calm my emotions, and battle harmful thought patterns. I began to truly embrace my way of thinking differently and saw it for all its positive attributes rather than dwelling on the negative. It felt like a rebirth. With this new reframing and this deeper understanding of my own unique neural network, I felt like I could think more clearly, communicate more effectively, and remain present in the moment.

Since then, I have continued to rely heavily on those life-preserving self-care routines. ADHD doesn't go away, but learning how to capitalize on your strengths and mitigate your weaknesses can help steer your ship to safe harbor. Self-care is not just a series of extravagances; it is also a form of being mindful of your individual needs so you can achieve a healthy, balanced, and happy life. Taking the time and effort toward self-nourishment continues to be the most healing journey of my life.

I am so grateful I was given this opportunity because I was able to write the guide that I wish someone had written for me. Self-care isn't a dazzling epiphany or a single life hack. It is a series of small choices that can lead you to a better you. Let me show you how...

Introduction

Living with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) requires being mindful of things that other people take for granted every day. Tasks and actions that come effortlessly to some people may be difficult for a person with ADHD to achieve. As a result, people with ADHD must learn how to take care of themselves in ways that reward and nourish their brains instead of making them feel like they are being forced to conform through a neurotypical lens. That's why, if you are coexisting with ADHD, it is especially important that you make time to care for yourself.

Developing healthy self-care practices is part of the behavioral management of ADHD. These practices allow you to meet daily life demands, participate more meaningfully, and remain in a healthy mental space. That's where *Self-Care for People with ADHD* comes in. In this book, you will find over one hundred self-care activities that will empower, rejuvenate, and help you be at your best.

Self-care for people living with ADHD involves more than just the stereotypical acts of pampering—it is a cache of survival techniques that prevent you from burning out. These techniques need to be practiced and understood and applied because it takes discipline to take responsibility for your well-being.

Here are just some of the activities you'll find in this book:

- Allow Yourself to De-Mask
- Recognize Your Triggers
- Learn How to Nourish Your Brain
- Understand and Recognize Hyperfocus

- Identify Rejection Sensitivity
- Be Aware of Interrupting
- Push Aside Perfectionism

As a clinician with ADHD, believe me when I tell you that fostering a healthy relationship with your diagnosis is key to living a fulfilling life. People with ADHD are creative, bright, bubbly, and energetic, and they make up a vibrant community that you should take pride in. And if you suspect that you may have ADHD and find yourself saying, “Hey, that sounds like me” while reading this book, speak with your doctor to get the support you need.

Self-care starts with the belief that you are valuable. Let this book uplift, validate, and encourage you because you *are* valuable! So, get ready to experience the healing powers of self-care!

CHAPTER ONE

Emotional Self-Care

People with ADHD need to be especially mindful of their emotional needs as they navigate through the journey of managing their symptoms. Due to emotional dysregulation, you struggle with feelings that seem bigger, more intense, and harder to control. You may be more easily impacted by other people's emotional climates. You may also struggle with feelings of shame and guilt, as you have limited control over your responses to emotionally demanding situations. This is why self-care—the actions you take to connect with your emotions and process them in a healthy way—is so vital.

In this chapter, you will learn how to nurture your own emotional needs. The activities described here will allow you to learn more about the intricacies and subtle nuances of the ADHD brain and how to utilize them to tend to your emotional landscape. These simple and actionable practices are meant to be repeated as often as needed and incorporated into a routine as you progress forward. A few emotional self-care activities you will find in this chapter are reframing your idea of failure, challenging negative thoughts, celebrating small wins, and focusing on gratitude. Responding to your emotional needs may not come naturally at first, but it becomes easier and more fulfilling as you learn to integrate it into your life. By regularly engaging in emotional self-care and employing self-compassion, you can develop healthy coping mechanisms that greatly enhance your joy and sense of well-being.

Find What You Are Grateful For

Gratitude is the thankful appreciation for what you have and receive. It is a way of acknowledging the good in your life. Focusing on gratitude is a foolproof way to become more connected with positive emotions, to handle adversity, and to cultivate healthy relationships. Here are tips about practicing gratitude:

- **It's not just for big things.** Be mindful of and appreciative for any good thing—big or small—that happens. Gratitude teaches you to reframe the way you view things: exploring and appreciating the good instead of ignoring it and focusing on the bad.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Learning to slow down your overactive, busy brain and really luxuriate in thinking about five to ten good things currently happening may help you become happier and experience deeper empathy. You can train your brain to be more conscious of things to be grateful about with repeated practice.
- **Help others.** An awareness of where other people need aid coupled with the ability to help them can immediately boost your well-being, which intrinsically makes you more capable of feeling gratitude. It also serves as a good reminder to cherish what you often take for granted.

Gratitude seems like it should be second nature to us, but it is actually a carefully curated skill. The key is to set some time aside and practice (I do it right before bed as a way of recapping my day). Try to think about some things you are grateful for and start your gratitude practice today.

Challenge Negative Thoughts

Most people have an ongoing dialogue with themselves. Positive self-talk can improve your mood and confidence and enhance your productivity. Negative self-talk can do the opposite, and, when coupled with self-doubt inherently caused by ADHD, it can be challenging to reframe things in a realistic way.

Evolutionarily speaking, negative self-talk is a part of the human experience. We are hardwired with a negativity bias, which means our brains tell us we are more likely to experience negative versus positive stimuli. This is our mind's way of protecting us from inherent threats. However, if left unchecked, negativity can be consuming.

Challenging negative thoughts is a disciplined practice of reframing your negative self-talk to create a positive shift in your mentality. Here are a few tips to challenge your indefatigable inner critic.

- 1. Become aware of negative self-talk.** Understand what the thought is, when you are having it, and why it is happening. This can be the first step in halting this automatic spiral into the negative.
- 2. Dispute the thought.** Think of hard evidence that disproves the thought you are having.
- 3. Prioritize effort over outcome.** By shifting the emphasis on how hard you try to do something, you may be able to detach yourself from catastrophizing about competency or ability.
- 4. Be kind to yourself.** Accepting that you are imperfect and still worthy of self-compassion is something we all could benefit from.

Allow Yourself to De-Mask

ADHD masking is when someone with ADHD presents in a way that makes them seem like they are not living with the disorder. This occurs in roughly a third of people with ADHD and disproportionately in women. Masking involves conscious and unconscious methods of camouflaging symptoms by mimicking behaviors of neurotypical people. People mask because it helps them to blend into society more seamlessly and bypass the stigma and judgment of their diagnosis.

ADHD masking is a way of hiding symptoms through learned behaviors. This can be normal and adaptive or unhealthy and limiting. Many people with ADHD have been forced to mask parts of themselves that society deems as unacceptable. This may be tenable for short periods, but, eventually, the weight of the mask becomes too heavy to bear.

Masking can lead to negative impacts like a delay in diagnosis, or people not validating your experience when you tell them you are struggling. In working so hard to mask, you may develop alternative coping skills that might lead you down the road to anxiety, depression, or substance abuse. Perhaps the most tragic consequence of masking is a loss of self. It may be hard to distinguish between what is you and what is the act you are putting on for other people.

But what can you do when masking becomes who you are? If you can identify when masking is taking place, you can start implementing new skills to cope, without having to create a more “acceptable” persona.

One of the first things to do is understand which of your masking behaviors are healthy (like finding an alternative way of fidgeting to be less obvious or mimicking other people’s facial expressions in a conversation) and which are detrimental (for example, allowing other people

to talk in conversation versus never speaking for fear your opinion may differ from what it is “supposed” to be).

Secondly, process through your emotions instead of avoiding them. A skilled therapist can help you navigate these emotionally laden waters. Sometimes, just allowing yourself to feel what you are feeling rather than rushing to cover it up is a vital step.

Find and enjoy a safe place. If you have found that you are masking, build time into your day where you can be your genuine self. Eventually, the disparity between the real you and your mask will grow, and you will gain the comfort to start unmasking in other situations. You may find that when this happens, it feels as though a weight has been lifted, as there is a certain freedom in living authentically.

Notice Your Inner Experience

People with ADHD often have difficulty interpreting their own internal environment. They can inadequately process emotional data, especially when it is coupled with robust physiological responses (rapid heart rate, facial flushing, muscle tension). For neurotypical people, this is a concerted performance that delivers data to your brain to guide behavior. In neurodivergent brains, this may be a staggered, erratic process that leaves you trying to interpret physical symptoms without understanding the underlying emotional trigger.

Alternatively (and perhaps more infuriatingly), people with ADHD deal with difficulty naming the emotion because all we feel is a sense of urgency. That makes it hard to figure out the appropriate course of action, as we may not know if we are fulfilled or bored, frustrated or disappointed, angry or embarrassed. Emotion involves interpreting physiological signals (elevated heart rate, for example). However, we are susceptible to inherent biases that cause us to misread ambiguous signals as dangerous ones.

Misinterpreted emotional information is a difficult and draining part of the ADHD experience. Through heightened awareness and coping skills (and professional help, if available), it is possible to better understand your mental milieu. Working on this skill set leads to greater emotional resilience and better communication, and it can significantly improve the quality of your life. Learning how your brain works helps you steer your life toward optimal success.

Throughout this process, just remain mindful that you always were and always will be so much more than the areas where you struggle.

Don't Dwell On Lost Time

One of the hardest things about being diagnosed later in life is the feeling that you have *lost* time. ADHD is commonly “skipped” or misdiagnosed because it is hard to diagnose intelligent adults who have developed coping skills to mask their deficits.

It can be hard to conceptualize the idea of missing a diagnosis when internally the struggle seems so apparent. However, maybe it's not just a diagnostic error. Maybe some of the delay is because you were told your entire life that you weren't living up to expectations, and now there is some trepidation about seeking treatment that validates that your brain is “broken.”

Maybe the deficit becomes so damaging that you finally take the first step. You work hard to advocate for yourself after years of failing to be heard. You get diagnosed, you get treated, and things finally feel like they should.

And *now* the grief sets in. Why didn't I do this sooner? I wasted so much time before treatment! Imagine what life could have been like.

Don't let yesterday's grief make you miss today's opportunity. Mourning the loss of time can be appropriate, but it often gets in the way of celebrating the opportunity of facing the world in a new way. It is entirely possible that in the time before adequately managing your ADHD, you were building coping skills that now you can utilize fully. It was not *lost* time; it was just a different time.

Write in a Journal

Journaling was something that I really enjoyed doing but had a lot of difficulty maintaining. I would get frustrated with myself for picking it up and giving it up so many times, especially when I felt like it was almost immediately beneficial every time.

So why is writing things in a journal such a helpful practice for those with ADHD?

- 1. It helps you slow down.** Journaling allows you to decelerate enough to clear out and organize your brain. The ADHD brain works circularly when it is overstimulated. It just spins around wildly and very rarely lands on a solution. When you can write down your thoughts, fears, and concerns, you can process them in a more leisurely fashion. After rereading my entries, I almost always came to a conclusion about what I wrote down (I also write things down when I am upset with someone so I can organize my thoughts, so be concerned if you get a written letter from me).
- 2. It helps you recognize patterns.** The other benefit is that journaling allows you to recognize your patterns, especially in the context of sequential entries. This is almost like witnessing your life from an external perspective because you have the benefit of looking at what you wrote as important, whereas you may forget those details as time progresses, which makes it hard to identify a pattern.
- 3. It helps you process through emotions more effectively.** Due to the emotional dysregulation that happens with ADHD, it is common to have certain cognitive distortion about your

experiences. Journaling is helpful because you can almost become an impartial party to what is going on, writing facts and then processing accordingly.

Just be mindful when you start your journaling to treat yourself with compassion. No one wants to reread a laundry list of their failures. This is a tool to encourage, inspire, and help you cope healthily with your steady flow of active thoughts. It's okay to write about things that weren't great, but this is not a medium for you to further drag yourself down with negative self-talk. Who is that helping?

By the way, if you look at a blank journal and freeze because it is almost too much commitment to put words into such a pristine, blank vessel, then find another way that works. It doesn't have to be pen and paper. Hammer away on your laptop. Do digital voice recordings. Record a personal vlog or create a social media channel (not a public channel; do this just for you!). There are tons of ways to get benefit from this exercise. Don't get tied up by the word "journaling"...it doesn't actually have to be in a journal.