

# Bonus

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## Let's Fix It!

**M**ore than anything else, when I found out that I had an ADD brain, I wanted to change it, straighten it out, repair it. Isn't that what you are supposed to do with a problem—solve it?

Now that I have years of awareness about my brain's ADD-ish-ness, I realize there isn't a single good solution. Rather, there is a combination of solutions that work for me. This chapter is limited to the solutions I have tried with some success. I have included some background information so you'll know a bit more about each possibility (I LOVE possibilities!).

This chapter is divided into five sections. The **first is about medication**. The **second is about people** who have helped with my ADD. The **third section discusses alternative treatments**. The **fourth section is about my favorite ADD gadgets**. And though I swore this book would NOT be about **tips and tricks**, in the **fifth section** I share some of my favorites with you anyway, just in case they might work for you.

## 1) Medication

The big gorilla in the room is medication, which almost all psychiatrists swear is the best treatment for ADD. It certainly is the fastest treatment for ADD. You take a pill (or slap on a patch), you can focus. Until the medication wears off. But medication also incites heated debate in the ADD community as to safety, potential for addiction or abuse and effectiveness.



There are angry accusations that pharmaceutical companies “push” drugs to boost their bottom line. I know enough about corporate America to take those accusations somewhat seriously. But for some people, ADD meds are quite literally a life-saver. So here’s a look at the lineup of ADD medications. Most of these drugs are FDA-approved for children only, but doctors routinely prescribe them for grownups.

There are two kinds of ADD medications: stimulants and non-stimulants. In the stimulant corner are two heavy hitters: amphetamines and methylphenadate. In a strange paradox, stimulants can actually focus even the hyperactive ADD brain

by helping our friends Nora Penne Effrin and Dope A. Mean effectively jump across the little gap between neurons (synapse). In the non-stimulant corner are a clutch of medications that impact mood and anxiety. Many ADD folks are dealing with anxiety (and some with depression, where our friend Sarah Tonin becomes more important). Non-stimulants can increase focus, but not with the dramatic impact seen in stimulants. For some people, non-stimulants are the only pharmaceutical option; stimulants can sometimes increase heart rate and blood pressure.

Although there are many brand names for ADD medications, many of them belong to the same family. Sometimes it's hard to keep track of which medications are essentially the same formulation with different delivery systems - or different paths for the meds to get into action in your brain. So let's sort them out to keep the families together.

## **Stimulants**

The **Amphetamines** (am-**fett**-a-meens) clan includes:

**Adderall**<sup>®</sup>

**Vyvanse**<sup>®</sup>

**Dexedrine**<sup>®</sup>

**Dextrostat**<sup>®</sup>

**Desoxyn**<sup>®</sup>

There are also generic equivalents of many of these amphetamines or mixed amphetamine salts. Some are short acting, meaning that their effective cycle is completed in three to five hours, and others are long acting, sometimes helping focus for twelve hours or more.

The **Methylphenadate** (meth-el-**fen**-ah-date) family includes:

**Ritalin**<sup>®</sup>

**Metadate**<sup>®</sup>

**Focalin**<sup>®</sup>

**Concerta**<sup>®</sup>

**Daytrana**<sup>®</sup> (patch)

Ritalin was the original stimulant medication approved for treatment of ADHD. It was developed in 1944 and named after the researcher's wife, Rita. It has been much maligned in the press, especially when administered to elementary school children, but it has the longest history of safety. It also has a history of abuse since it can be injected or crushed and snorted.

Drug companies rushed to create new delivery systems to deter abuse. Concerta capsules contain a tiny sponge that slowly expands in the digestive tract, gradually pushing the medication through a pinpoint hole. Daytrana is a skin patch saturated with the medication that makes its way into the bloodstream.

The amount and frequency of dosage for stimulants depends not on the size of the person, but on the rate that the drug is metabolized (absorbed and utilized) by the body. A petite woman may be prescribed a higher dose of a stimulant than a burly gentleman for both to achieve the same effect on focus and attention.

### **Non-stimulants**

There are several non-stimulant ADHD medications:

**Strattera**<sup>®</sup> –atomoxetine (at-o-**mo**x-i-teen)

Atomoxetine is a tricyclic antidepressant formulation that inhibits reuptake of norepinephrine (Yay, Nora!) in the brain. It is used to reduce anxiety rather than to increase focus. It is one of the few medications approved for use by ADHD adults.

**Intuniv**<sup>®</sup> –guanfacine (**gwan**-fa-seen)

**Kapvay**<sup>®</sup> –clonidine (**klon**-a-deen)

Both guanfacine and clonidine were originally used to treat high blood pressure. They seem to have a calming effect on ADHD patients and provide some attention and focus improvement. Kapvay has been approved for use alone or as an add-on to stimulant medication.

### **“Second line” ADHD medications**

Some drugs are used “off label” to help ADHD symptoms but are not FDA approved for ADHD treatment. They usually deliver a less robust effect on ADHD symptoms than first line medications. They include:

**Wellbutrin**<sup>®</sup> (bupropion), an antidepressant also used in smoking cessation programs

**Tofranil**<sup>®</sup> (imipramine), a tricyclic antidepressant that is also used to treat bedwetting

**Pamelor**<sup>®</sup> (nortriptyline) also a tricyclic antidepressant

**Tenex**<sup>®</sup> (guanfacine), used to treat high blood pressure

**Catapres**<sup>®</sup> (clonidine), ditto for blood pressure

(both of these meds have an ADHD formulation under a different brand name; see previous page.)

### **A few words about generic ADHD medications**

Some ADD medications are still “under patent” which means that the pharmaceutical company that developed the drug and went through the long process of obtaining FDA approval is allowed to sell it under their brand name. By US law, no one else is permitted to sell that formulation for a period of twelve years; then generic equivalents can be produced.



Not surprisingly, the brand name drug is more expensive

than the generic because the drug company must “make hay while the sun shines”—they charge much higher prices to offset their research and development expenses. They also reap handsome profits during the years of patent protection. That might sound a bit greedy on the part of Big Pharma, but at least when your doctor prescribes the brand name drug, you know what you are getting.

When you take a generic, the formulation doesn’t follow the exact recipe originally developed. It uses an *equivalent* formula. According to the FDA requirements, a generic drug may contain as little as 80% of the active ingredient(s) or as much as 125%. My guess is that very few generics contain more than 100% of the active ingredients. Most generics fall within a 4% range either way, which is roughly the same range between batches of brand name drugs. If you are sensitive to medication, however, that small difference can have a big impact on your response to the medication.

There is yet another significant difference between generics and brand name drugs. A brand name drug consistently has the same base formula that contains the active ingredients, like the coating, the filler, etc. Generic drug companies create their own base formulation, which can vary among different companies.



I've talked to ADD women who couldn't take anything but the brand name medication. I've talked to ADD women who could take only the generic version. But I have also talked to ADD women taking a generic successfully, then having problems when her pharmacy switched the company from which they purchased their generics. The percentage of active ingredients could have changed or the base formula was different.

It's a difficult situation; pay expensive brand name prices or take your chance with generics. [An aside: some generics are absolutely fine; others have a checkered history, as in the 300 mg tablets of Wellbutrin XR equivalent, which has now been remedied. Stay alert to changes in your response to meds.]

### **Pros and cons of ADHD meds-quick overview**

**Pro:** stimulants improve focus quickly; medication is usually covered by health insurance; most meds are readily available through local pharmacies; some studies show medication reduces the incidence of illegal substance abuse; response to medication sometimes offers insight into what neurotransmitters are most affected (If we respond well to methylphenidate, there is likely a problem with norepinephrine and/or dopamine; positive response to amphetamines likely means a dopamine deficiency).

**Con:** serious side effects in some people; difficult to get the right dose of the right drug or combination of drugs; high rate of “non compliance” which means ADD folks often forget to take or stop taking them; expensive if generic is not available; some stimulant doses must be increased over time to maintain effect; some new studies show amphetamines damage neuron cells and increase long term risk of Parkinson’s disease.

Please view this brief overview as the **beginning** of your education about ADHD medications. There are websites and books devoted exclusively to this topic. Remember that there is no perfect ADD medication, so work with your doctor to get the best combination of treatments.

## 2) The “people” solutions

### **Psychiatrists/Physicians, Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants**

Most people start here. They think an M.D. is the key to an ADD diagnosis and appropriate treatment. Partly true. Psychiatrists do diagnose ADD, either with functional intake interviews or testing. Some docs use SPECT brain scans although there is still some controversy as to their accuracy for diagnosis. Others use computer testing. But psychologists can also

diagnose ADD, so don't limit yourself if you're looking for an opinion that will stand up to insurance scrutiny.

Not all MDs (medical doctors), NPAs (Nurse Practitioners) and PAs (Physician's Assistants) are created equal in the ADD world. It's not enough to have a license on the wall; your ADD professional needs specialized training. That means ADD-specific continuing medical education and/or participant in organizations like CHADD (Children and Adults with ADHD) or ADDA (Attention Deficit Disorder Association). Don't be intimidated; ask questions. Better yet, talk to other ADD adults and get a personal recommendation.

You'll find ADD expertise among medical doctors in some unexpected places. Because they deal with children's ADD, pediatricians can be a good source of information and they may be willing to treat your ADD or at least offer a referral. Depending on your location, finding a great ADD doc can be simple or excruciatingly difficult. If you live in an area with a "deficit" of ADD doctors, don't limit yourself to local experts. You can go all the way across the country to get an ADD diagnosis, as I did. Then work with your local doctor on treatment. [An aside: most diagnostic testing is not covered by health insurance so be prepared to pay out of pocket. Cost vary widely but a midrange is \$400 - \$500. Subsequent

appointments for medication management or check-ins are usually covered as regular psychiatric or medical care.]

As a reminder, in the United States only a physician (MD), nurse practitioner (NA) or physician's assistant (PA) can write prescriptions for medication dispensed through a pharmacy. To prescribe "controlled substances" such as like amphetamines and other stimulants, the medical professional must hold a current DEA number, which is granted by the federal government. In the US, drugs classified as controlled substances are regulated by the DEA (Drug Enforcement Act).



There is a strict limit on the production of each drug regulated to prevent abuse; often controlled substances are illegal when used for recreational purposes but they have legitimate medicinal use when taken as prescribed. Each year, the DEA tried to estimate the demand for prescriptions of every drug they regulate. If they underestimate, as they did in 2010, there is a shortage of that drug (more adults were diagnosed with ADHD than expected and by the end of the fiscal year, there was a shortage of Ritalin/methylphenadate).

In most states, doctors are not allowed to phone in a prescription for a controlled substance. A paper prescription is required and there are usually no refills permitted although

most states allow dispensing a 90-day supply. This no-refills, paper-prescription rule does not apply to non-stimulant ADD meds like Strattera® or Wellbutrin®.

### **Psychologists, therapists and counselors**

Psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers and counselors get lumped together, sometimes to their dismay. But their common connecting point is that they are usually eligible to submit insurance claims for their services, which is great news for ADDivans with health insurance.

Psychologists (those whose credentials include a doctorate like a Ph.D. or Psy. D.) can diagnose ADD. Some of them use a computer model (often the T.O.V.A. - Test Of Variable Attention); others use a collection of psychological evaluations. Some use lengthy intake interviews, which is just as accurate for diagnosis, as I learned firsthand. Psychologists cannot prescribe medication but often work closely with MDs, NAs or PAs who can write scripts for stimulants and other meds. Psychotherapists (or therapists) hold a masters degree in psychology or a related field. They usually offer traditional talk therapy, which is an excellent choice for the sidecar problems that almost always accompany ADD: family and relationship issues, depression, mood swings. Talk therapy has not proven effective to improve ADD concentration or focus, however.

Some psychology professionals specialize in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which has been either very effective for ADD or not-so-effective for ADD, depending on which research you choose to read and trust. CBT is behavior modification: teach skills, set expectations and implement consequences.

Coaching has a good track record for dealing with the accountability issues which plague ADD. Some psychology professionals have embraced a more coach-like approach to therapy. Since therapy may be reimbursed by insurance, a therapist-coach can be a two-for-one, if appeals to you.

### **ADHD coaches**

I've heard coaching described as "therapy light," but that's a misnomer. Coaches do work one-on-one with clients like therapists or psychologists, but they focus on what's ahead rather than the reasons behind your behaviors and thoughts. Like an athletic coach, an ADD coach can help you improve your "game," clarify your goals and point you in the right direction to achieve them.

A good ADD coach is worth their weight in ADD gold. He or she can be your cheerleader, your educator, your accountability partner, your inspiration.

A poorly trained (or worse, untrained) coach who markets himself or herself as an ADD expert can be a disaster. As with doctors and psychology professionals, ADD specialization requires specific skills beyond life coaching skills.



ADHD coaches  
never use  
whistles!

The problem is that coaching is not regulated by licensing, which opens the door to charlatans. The only way to make sure your ADD coach is legit is to check their training and/or certification. There are now certifications specific to ADHD coaching, although they are not yet recognized by mainstream coaching organizations. It's only a matter of time before ADD coaches are able to be sorted out by their credentials. Until then, interview carefully and ask the right questions (download "13 Questions You MUST Ask Your ADD Coach" in the Additional Resources section).

I am asked often how a coach can be effective when he or she has ADD. It's simple: coaches are trained to "get out of the way" so that the coaching is all about you. And I believe that coaches with ADD understand the challenges with a different, more empathetic approach. Just my two cents.

Until recently, there were only a few hundred ADD coaches in the world, but thanks to a growing training sector and heightened interest in coaching, there's probably a coach in your area. If not, don't give up. While therapists and counselors must meet their clients face-to-face, coaching can be done long distance by phone, email and online video conferencing. Most coaches have clients all over the country and world.

The good news is that coaching is a short term proposition, usually three to nine months. The bad news is that coaching is not covered by health insurance (although that could be good news if you'd like to maintain your ADD privacy).

Coaches aren't inexpensive, either. Expect to pay \$65 to \$300 or more per session, depending on the coach's experience, location and services offered. But having untreated ADD is pretty expensive, too.

### **Team ADDiva**

There was a point in the not-too-distant past when I was in constant overwhelm. Everything was falling apart. In desperation I took out a pen and paper and wrote down everything I was doing (or should be doing). It was a long list and contained far more things to do than there were hours in my day or week or month: laundry, gardening, feeding the



dogs, snuggling with Victor, editing my website, going to the gym, replacing light bulbs, hanging pictures and dozens more.

Then I made a second list of those tasks could *only* be done by me. No one else could write my books or facilitate my retreats or snuggle with Victor (of course not!). No one else could organize my office or plan my garden. Those tasks required my special touch; they were my avenue to share my gifts with the world.

As I reviewed the lists, I found that there were some things I wanted to do or had always done in the past, but, if I was honest, didn't require my personal touch. I did not have to be the person who checked the post office box every day. I'm not the one who had to pull every single weed out of the lettuce or daisies. You get the picture.

Then, I began to systematically outsource the jobs that didn't require my personal touch or attention. That's when Team ADDiva began to take shape. [Now wait just a minute: before your Monitor starts telling you that you can't afford a team, you should know that "outsourcing" doesn't have to cost a lot of money. You can outsource to your own family members, friends or neighbors.]

For instance, if you are doing the laundry for everyone in your household, stop it right now! Laundry does *not* requires your personal touch (unless you love doing it). Show the non-laundry-aware members of your family how to operate the washer and dryer and let them loose. Be resolute about your commitment to yourself; don't give in and throw in a couple of loads when they run out of clean clothes. They can throw in a couple of loads just as easily as you can. The same technique also applies to starting dinner or mowing the lawn.

I found a kiddo in the neighborhood who would pull weeds for \$8.00 an hour. My time is worth more than that and the guilt it relieved was priceless. Of course, I had to spend a couple of hours showing him the difference between a weed and a seedling and he made some mistakes but that was OK.

Now, I could have had this kiddo plant my garden, but that's the part that I love. It feeds me, fills me up with creativity and anticipation. So that's a job I will never outsource.

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of working with a variety of ADDiva team members. I don't use them all at once—that would be too expensive! But I make use of them when I honestly need them. **Don't skip this section** - you may find inspiration for your own ADD here.



Out, out, darned weed!

## Professional organizers

A lot of people refuse to consider hiring a professional organizer because they think they need to banish their piles first (kind of like cleaning your house before the cleaning lady comes). That's just silly, although, as I've told you, I experienced the same reluctance.

There's a lot of embarrassment about being unable to do the basics like keep your own space clean and tidy. However, no matter what kind of shape your house or apartment is in, professional organizers have seen worse - dog poop in the dining room, maggots in closets. Don't worry about it. Just call them (if you can find the slip of paper with their phone number!).

It's hard to believe today, but professional organizers were once scarce commodities. Now, thanks to television shows about hoarders and clean houses, they are popping up everywhere. There is certification for professional organizers but not everyone who claims to be an organizer has taken classes. Quality is a bit uneven, so look for someone who has been in the business for more than a few months. Most importantly, you want someone who is non-judgmental and willing to adapt to your style.



The piles get neater  
with a professional organizer

Professional organizers work by the hour, usually in three-to-four hour blocks. Prices range from \$45 - \$150 or more an hour. How many sessions will it take to get “done?” That depends on how much clutter you’ve accumulated and how far down the decluttering road you want to go.

If you can stand to part with some of your stuff, it will be a lot easier (and cheaper) to go through some of the mess before you meet with the organizer. But sometimes we need a professional to get us started. Remember, ADD causes problems with initiating tasks as well as completing them so it may take a professional to help sort through the good, the Goodwill and the good-for-nothing.

Don’t overlook the possibility of help from a good friend if a professional is out of your budget. Just make sure they are coming in to sort, not to judge. Or you may need a body double, someone to merely sit with you while you work.

### **Body Double**

The name is misleading; a Body Double doesn’t mirror your activities. They simply are a presence in the space, which for some odd reason, helps us to focus.

Victor acted as a Body Double when he came to my office while I reorganized the file cabinets. Note that he didn't *do* anything except sit there. We didn't even speak to each other; I needed to focus all my attention on the task at hand. He read his journals; I worked.

A Body Double must be someone willing to be in the room and **give no advice**. They are not allowed to judge your mess or project or progress. Their energy is what you need; not their counsel. Be careful about this if you invite a family member or good friend to act as your Body Double. They may have long experience with you and have some established opinions about what should work and how you should proceed. Sometimes, a new acquaintance can be better than an old friend as a Body Double.

If you use a Body Double, do *not* entertain them. They are not your guest; they are a silent partner. Not only silent, but immobile, at least for me. Having someone walk around is a distraction I don't need. Get them a cup of tea and let them knit or write or read. No phone calls - overhearing their conversation will pull you off course.

### **Housekeeper/cleaning person/straightener-upper**

Even if you live in a tiny studio apartment, your ADD can slowly (or not so slowly) create piles and laundry and dust that sit there, leering at you day after day. They will drive you crazy. So hire a housekeeper, once in a while. Or regularly.

When my sons were toddlers, my mother gifted me with a once-a month cleaning lady named Hose-lena. I am not making this up. It was the best gift ever: clean bathrooms gave me a small dose of sanity.

I have ADD clients who use a cleaning service only when the dirt gets out of control and others who have someone come in twice a week. If you can't afford any extra expense, invite a friend over to help you clean (like a Body Double who works with you) and then reciprocate by heading over to his or her house. There's no cost to either of you except time.

Training household help can be a challenge for ADD folks. I More than once, I've fallen into Little Red Hen mode - "I'll just do it myself!" But it's worth the time to teach someone that they are to wipe off the counters but leave your piles untouched.



Where's Mary Poppins when we need her?



Something  
always  
needs fixing

## Handyman

There is always stuff to fix around my house—broken lamps, closet shelves that have fallen down, chipped paint in the hallway. I know how to fix a lot of those things, but do I fix them? Nope. They sit there for years waiting for me to get around to them; I think it might be a small hit of procrastination.

So when I finally found a reliable handyman (\$25-\$60 an hour) it was like lifting a veil from my life. My guilt about not hanging the picture or fixing the light was dragging me down more than I realized. In just a few hours (far less time than it would have taken me) I felt like a free woman again. Having someone to call when you're in a crunch lets you focus on what's important: the things only you can do.

Of course you don't need a handyman every week or even every month, but he or she is an invaluable part of Team ADDiva. [Aside: your husband or partner may be willing to take on this role, but be careful about overloading them with a long Honey Do list; it can devastate a relationship.]

## Other members of Team ADDiva

— **Good appliance repair guy or gal**  
(might be your handyman)

- **Dry cleaner that offers pick up** and delivery  
at your home or work
- **Laundry service**  
(drop off in the morning, pick up at night)
- **Landscaper** to handle the heavy stuff
- **Bank person who knows your name**  
(invaluable for overdrafts or credit line expansion)
- **Friendly neighbor** who will take the kids,  
accept UPS packages and/or trade organizing  
or Body Double services
- **Sitter for kids or aging parents** so you have some  
much-needed time off

### 3) The non-medication solution

#### **Alternative treatments abound**

If you browse the internet looking for ADD cures, there is no lack of potions and supplements that purport to heal and mitigate ADD symptoms. There testimonials from parents who swear that a particular diet transformed their child from monster to sweetheart. There are pills with mystical ingredients guaranteed to call your neurons to attention. There are mind exercises and balance boards to train the two hemispheres of your brain to work together. In other words, there's a lot of room for fraud.



## Nutrition

Right after I found out about my ADD, a therapist I was seeing gave me a diet she called the “Pre-frontal Cortex Diet.” It was a low carbohydrate diet with lots of protein: eggs and bacon



for breakfast, a salad with chicken or fish for lunch and meat and plain veggies for dinner. Pretty bland, with no scientific back-up to prove its effectiveness. Nonetheless, I felt better when I tried it, perhaps because it limited carbohydrates, one of my ADD sore spots.

It's easy for me to get on the carbohydrate roller coaster (eat bread, fruit or something sweet, feel great, then crash and crave even more bread, fruit or sweets, repeat 'til comatose with sugar). What I learned over the years is that fewer carbs stabilize my blood sugar, which also keeps my ADD on an even keel. The problem is that my brain really wants carbs. I have to be a strict disciplinarian.

Very restrictive diets like the Feingold plan, eliminate food coloring and other synthetic additives from foods ingested. Recently, the FDA investigated the effect of food dyes on children (deliberately feeding them drinks loaded with dye). The results were mixed but there does seem to be a connection between behavior and food dye. The link between ADHD

and nutrition is still fuzzy. There is only a smattering of peer-reviewed research about ADHD and the brain, but it is an area of intense interest. It may well be that diet *does* play an important role in ADD. Stay tuned.

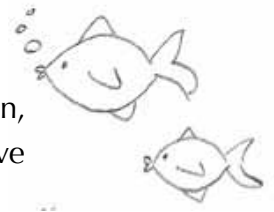
## Supplements

The jury is still out on whether nutritional supplements help ADD. There are proponents of supplements who swear they make a difference. But perhaps the ADD symptoms they experienced didn't arise from brain physiology but from food allergies or other triggers for distractible behaviors. New research points to histamines as a possible source of inattentive, ADD-like actions in children. So, much more research is needed. In the meantime, I'll share my experience with a few supplements.

### *Fish oil and omega-3 fatty acids*

The most compelling evidence to improve brain plasticity and brain function come from research on fish oil supplements that provide omega-3 fatty acids. Our Western diet is full of omega-6 fatty acids but relatively few omega-3s.

Medline, the US government's website for medical information, credits fish oil for helping to lower triglyceride levels, improve health and possibly reduce high blood pressure. There is a long list of other potential positive benefits including help with



Fish oil is  
good for  
your brain

menstrual pain, rheumatoid arthritis and lowering cholesterol. The Attention Deficit Disorder research was conducted with children ages 8-14 who had learning disabilities.

After taking a combination of fish oil and evening primrose oil for several months, the LD kids advanced one full grade level in reading, while the control group progressed at the same grade level.

New research seems to refute that finding, but my psychiatrist continues to support using it. There are many other benefits from taking pharmaceutical grade fish oil with very little down side. The average amount for adults to take each day? About 2500 mg of combined EPA and DHA. Taking too much can cause health problems, so don't "go overboard."

A word about getting the correct amount of omega-3 fatty acids. The total amount of oil proclaimed on the front of the bottle can be misleading, so be careful. The important numbers are on the BACK of the label—the amount of DHA and EPA. Add those two numbers together to get the amount of omega-3 that you need.

You might want to avoid my mistake: I thought that taking one capsule would give me the amount of EPA and DHA on the

back label. I finally reread the label: the “serving size” was TWO capsules to equal 1280 omega-3s. I had been taking only half the amount I wanted. Ack!

[An aside about storing fish oil capsules. After you open the package, oil tends to go rancid, so always store the capsules liquid in the freezer (the oil won’t freeze but stays fresh). This technique also reduces that awful fish “burp” that sometime accompanies our omega-3 booster.]



Store your fish oil  
in the freezer

### *“Attention” supplements*

I am always skeptical of supplements that don’t have some sort of peer-reviewed research to back up their claims. Most companies who manufacture supplements have their own testing and research labs, which is a blatant conflict of interest. *Of course* their tests show excellent results; they want to sell you their supplements! Rarely is this good science; my husband disdainfully calls it “junk science.”

Nonetheless, I have tried several vitamin supplements that purport to help increase focus, attention and memory, with varying degrees of success.

“Attend” is sold by a company named VAXA and is part of their three-pronged homeopathic approach to helping ADD.

I did notice a difference in my anxiety level when I took Attend, but not much change in focus. The company claims that results from the computerized TOVA improved when ADD children took Attend. Perhaps it works better for children than adults.

VAXA's other supplements suggested for ADD are "Exstres" to alleviate stress and "Memorin" for memory enhancement. I found no benefit to these supplements. The Memorin in particular upset my system a bit, so I stopped using it after only two doses.

I did seem to get a focus response from Focus Smart, a vitamin and mineral supplement I bought at my local wholesale warehouse. It contained an ingredient that is supposed to increase alertness, which is the effect I noticed. However, FocusFactor, a far more expensive brand, had no effect. Essentially, it was a combination of vitamins.

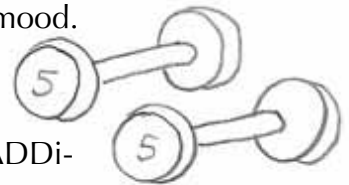
My husband Victor, always skeptical of over-the-counter drugs that are not regulated nor tested through double-blind studies, is less than enthused about my experimentation. So far, no ill effects have been felt, except in my budget. But his point is well taken. Be careful when you take supplements. The companies who produce them, while well intentioned,

are profit centers, not research centers. They want your money. And their combination of “natural” ingredients does not guarantee safety. Some herbal supplements have been shown to have serious health consequences. We’re right back to “caveat emptor” (let the buyer beware) again. But for a refreshing change of pace, there are alternative treatments that cause positive side effects.

### **Exercise**

The most effective non-medication treatment for ADD is exercise. It not only boosts focus and concentration, but primes the pump for better sleep. It helps midlife waistlines and body tone. It helps bone density and it helps depression and mood. It’s the perfect non-prescription prescription.

So if exercise is so good for us, why do the majority of ADDi-vas pledge to go to the gym and then skip half the yoga classes? It’s the chicken and egg scenario. We need focus and concentration to stick with exercise. Exercise will give us focus and concentration, but we have to get ourselves focused to exercise: the ultimate vicious circle. ‘Round and ‘round we go, trying to squeeze in time for something we know works, but we continue to procrastinate. This is one of those “just do it” things that probably deserves a kick in the pants to start the



Work out  
almost every  
day

circle in reverse: we are focused, so we get to exercise class which makes us more focused.

### **Memory training**

There are a lot of brain exercises out there but none are as well-researched and supported by the scientific community as Cogmed. Cogmed trains working memory, which you may (or may not) recall, is crucial to executive function. The original psychologists who developed the computer program were trying to help children with learning disabilities, but the program turns out to have a positive effect on ADD, on memory issues due to aging and other brain glitches.

I told you I would only mention treatments with which I had personal experience. I have been through Cogmed. Twice. I am embarrassed to admit it, but I was a Cogmed dropout. I shouldn't have signed up because I was so busy, I didn't have the time to devote to training (which is intense). I also really disliked the program which uses computer games similar to video games. I abhor video games.

However, I stuck it out the second time and finished the program, boosting my working memory by several percentage points. Not a top notch result, but respectable.

Cogmed plays to my weaknesses, which is the point. Easy exercises wouldn't push my brain into better function. So even though I don't like it, I see Cogmed like cod liver oil: a necessary gulp that ultimately helped me.

Cogmed can be administered only by medical doctors and psychologists. The coaching that accompanies the program can be done by folks without a doctorate.

My Cogmed provider (a psychiatrist) found that the program works quite well for children. The program itself was less effective for adults, probably because we have a lifetime of creating strategies that circumvent our ADD. With better working memory skills, we have to first unlearn the bad old strategies and relearn new and improved ones. That takes time and effort. My provider has created a post Cogmed support group to help adult graduates implement changes into their lives. And she recommends strongly that adults continue the Cogmed training after graduation (there is a follow-up program included in the initial cost).

The price of this program is high - from \$1500 to \$1800 for the five week course. As mentioned early, the price of ADD is pretty high, too.



### **Other honorable mentions**

Neurofeedback has its place in ADD treatment, especially for children. I have worked with neurofeedback only briefly and can see the potential benefits. Research results are inconclusive at the moment but that is unimportant if it helps you. A woman in our support group reported great results at first, then as time went on, she slipped back into her ADD-ish patterns.

I am quite interested in music therapy that is tuned to particular wave patterns in our brains. I have not figured out whether we need more theta and less beta and I'm sure there are proponents on both sides of the argument. The ADD sound therapy I have used has not made much of an impact on my concentration, despite claims to the contrary. Again, if it works for you, three cheers!

There are a number of additional alternative treatments for ADD not mentioned here because I have not personally tested them. The world is full of opportunities to assist ADD; find the solutions that work in your life.

### **4) ADD gadgets**

I am a gadget kind of gal, which isn't surprising since my ADD loves anything new and complex. I could spend hours waxing

poetic about iPhone apps and bluetooth headsets. I will try to restrain myself here, though and offer a light dusting of my ADDiva favorites.

### **Wireless phone headsets**

Nothing changed my world quite as much as the wireless headset I bought for my office phone. I bought my first one for coaching, since most coaches work by phone and a headset frees our hands to take notes. I soon realized the value of being able to walk around while talking on the phone (multi-tasking here I come!). I can work in the garden while I talk. I can pace back and forth to release my anxiety. I can do dishes. I can even go the bathroom while I am listening to teleclasses (don't tell anyone; I only go there when I'm "muted!").

I adore my wireless headset so much so that I bought one for my house. Then I bought one for GardenSpirit, my retreat house. Then I bought one for my bedroom. For me, they are essential to managing my ADD. My current favorite: GN Netcom 9125.

By contrast, the bluetooth headset for my cell phone, was awful. It would fall off my ear, I would accidentally disconnect calls when I was trying to increase the volume, and the sound was atrocious. I finally found the equivalent of my wonderful wireless headset in cell phone form. It's the one used by long

distance truckers and has crystal clear reception and transmission. Freedom at last! My favorite brand: Blue Parrot 250-XT

### **FOFA**

Clients and ADD folks ask one question more than any other: “How can I keep track of my car keys?” My answer is always the same: FOFA - short for Find One, Find All. These ingenious key finders have little beepers embedded in keychains with number pads on the surface. I attach one to my keys, another to my purse (on the strap), another to my camera. When I want to find my keys, I can push the FOFA on my purse and it rings the keys! Amazing! If I can find one of those three FOFAs, I can ring any of the others. Problem solved.

### **Smart pen**

I have hankered for something that would allow me to take notes and record sound at the same time. A few years ago, someone finally invented it: the Smart Pen. In a barrel that looks a lot like a fountain pen is a tiny camera that captures my handwriting (ugh!) as well as a microphone (yay!). Everything is saved and transferred to my computer via USB. Wow. This is one of life’s minor miracles in my humble opinion. Prices have dropped dramatically and quality has improved so it’s a no brainer for ADD. Current favorite: Echo pen by Livescribe.

### **Atomic clocks**

I have gradually replaced almost all the clocks in my house and office with atomic versions. I never have to set them. They change automatically when we “fall back” or “spring ahead” during seasonable time changes. And even when I need to replace the batteries, they reset themselves again within minutes. Thank you, atomic clock inventors. You are helping me get to appointments on time. Usually.

### **iPhone/smart phone**

I won't go on and on about how my iPhone helps my ADD, but let's just say that I now have my calendar synced from my office, my appointments are always within reach, I can get my email on the road and I can set alarms so I start and stop projects more easily. Enough said.

Ditto for my iPad, which I also adore. I can work anywhere and the iPad keypad is SO much easier for my 50-something eyes and fingers.

### **Labeler**

I supposed I should have listed my P-Touch Brother labeler first in this list. It is certainly first in my heart. I label almost everything: files, cabinet drawers, headset, copier directions, location of mobile phones (on the back of the phone),



notebooks, makeup bottles, tires with PSI limits, electrical circuit box, garden tools, sinks, storage containers, transformers for computer accessories, nail polish containers, shoe boxes, clothes hampers ... more every day. I tell Victor that if he stands still too long, I might even label him!

A note about labels: yes, masking tape works too, but only if you can read your handwriting. My dysgraphic precludes that solution. Also, masking tape is not laminated; the label tapes are. The labeler is relatively cheap; laminated tapes are not. Order them in bulk from a discount store or the internet. You'll find the complete array here, but you can often find older models in discount sites or ebay.

### **Timers**

Normally I am unenthused about nagging reminders like timers, but they do work for me. I like unusual sounds, though, so I am not annoyed by the darned thing. My favorite is a Tibetan bell timer that is supposed to be used with a telephone. The bell timer is easy to set (a knob, not buttons), has a big bright display and rings loudly the first time. Then it divides the original time in half and rings again. The timer goes off more and more frequently until it is chiming every two seconds. By that time, I am irritated or resigned to turning the alarm off.

## 5) Tips and tricks

OK, no introduction, just a list of things that work for me:

1. Several clocks in every room (especially the bathroom) so I can track time more easily.
2. Duplicate bottles of medication in the places I frequent most often - in the car, purse, bathroom, kitchen, office, retreat house (it takes two).
3. SuperSticky PostIts that stick to almost everything - for computer, car, mirrors (only ONE item written on each one)
4. Spiral notebooks for notes and phone messages so I don't lose the pages. (Wide rule works better for my handwriting - lots of white space).





5. Three-ring notebooks for every class, every committee, every client, every project, (2") large enough to hold spiral notebooks and a set of plastic dividers.

6. A dozen pairs of cheap readers (glasses) with "strings" on them so they don't fall off. I never lose the cheapies; only my prescription glasses get lost!

7. Foam drink holders with feathers on every desk to hold my reading glasses (I can always find them - look for the feathers!)

8. Multiple clothes hampers because I hate to sort dirty clothes (one for underwear, blacks, bras, colors, jeans)

9. Colorful file folders with a code. (I have a color key posted on each cabinet so everyone knows purple folders are ADDiva, red folders are expenses, etc.)

10. Hang clothes grouped by color in your closet - easy to find

11. Turn piles into files, even if the files stay there. At least there is some order (but put a SuperSticky post-it in on the file so you don't have to go through it again — THINK ONCE).

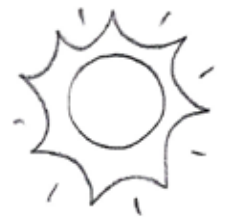
12. Bookmarks on the computer when I finally find what I want; don't buy it then. Curb impulse. If I want it tomorrow, then I can buy it. Sometimes I hesitate for weeks.

13. Measure first before buying organizing supplies, no matter how tempting and neat-inspiring they are.

14. Purging the stuff that frustrates you - dull knives, fussy clothes, shoes that pinch, broken canister you'll never fix - less stuff means less organizing.

15. Small adjustable tables (\$20) arranged in a circle around you to sort big messes. You can move the tables to another room, then come back to the mess; no one will "mess" with your mess.

16. Get rid of those old clothes. Stroll through your closet and take half of the stuff out that you don't wear. Then take half more out. Take the discards to Goodwill or send them to your sister. You will NOT miss these clothes, I promise. And you will feel so much lighter and FREE.



17. Get outside every morning and take a walk to stimulate the melatonin in your brain so you wake up to the day (rain or shine). Turns on your serotonin, too (yay, Ms. Tonin).



18. Duplicate sets of makeup in your purse, bathroom, car and travel kit so you never end up without mascara 10 minutes before you are supposed to give a graduation speech (yes, it happened to me).

19. Reconnect to the earth. Plant something. Walk slowly under newly-leafed-out trees. Run your fingers through the grass. Breathe deeply and remember Who You Really Are (hint: a magnificent woman!).

20. Five minutes to Put It Away. You have time (this is the most difficult one for me to remember).

21. A permanent grocery list. Go through your cabinets, freezer and refrigerator and make a list of the most-replaced food items. Then type them into the computer and add check-boxes. Print it out and post it on the refrigerator. When you run out of something, simply check off that item. If you are really organized, you can write the groceries to correspond to the layout of your store. Don't forget to take it with you!

And there's more...

If any of these tips, tricks, professionals, medications, supplements, etc. improve your ADD, congratulations! You may have decided that you have finally “fixed it.”

Trust me, it’s only temporary. ADD isn’t something that responds well to the quick fix. Each of these “tricks” are a finger in the dike. They may stave off the flood, but they cannot repair the dam. A combination of them can create a web of plugs that can keep the flood at bay most of the time.

To be truly at peace with ADD requires a closer look at the person behind the ADD brain. *You*. So gather all the “solutions” that work for you, then take a step back to see Who You Really Are inside that web. Make sure you maintain your integrity and authenticity. Then live your life out loud as the glorious ADDiva you were born to be!

## Resources

Brother P-touch labelers

<http://www.brother-usa.com/ptouch/>

Tibetan bell timer

[http://www.now-zen.com/Phone\\_Bell.html](http://www.now-zen.com/Phone_Bell.html)

Atomic clocks

<http://www.everyatomicclock.com/All-Atomic-Clocks-C117852.html>

Smart pen

<http://www.livescribe.com/en-us/smartpen/>

Find One Find All key finder

<http://www.findonefindall.com/>

iPhone and iPad

<http://apple.com>

Cogmed memory training

<http://cogmed.com>

ADHD coaches

<http://adhdcoaches.org>

Bluetooth headset for cell phone

<http://www.vxicorp.com/products/blueparrott-bluetooth-mobile-solutions/bluetooth-headsets/b250-xt/>

Wireless headset for land lines/USB

<http://www.jabra.com/NA-US/headsetsolutions/Pages/JabraGN9100.aspx>

National Organization of Professional Organizers

<http://napo.net>

Handyman & house cleaners

<http://craigslist.com>

Brain supplement reviews

(as close to unbiased as I could find online)

<http://brainresearchsupplements.com/>

Exercise videos

<http://www.collagevideo.com/>

## Reference and further reading

Ritalin/methyphenadate

<http://www.cesar.umd.edu/cesar/drugs/ritalin.asp>

Amphetamines

<http://www.cesar.umd.edu/cesar/drugs/amphetamines.asp>

Guanfacine

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0000057/>

Atomoxetine/Strattera

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0000222/>

Fish oil

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/993.html>