



MAKE ADULT ADHD

WORK FOR

Some of the most successful people in the world have serious concentration and organisational issues. So what worked? Many turned their ADHD into an advantage.

By **Robyn von Geusau**

Think of scientist Albert Einstein, athletic legends Michael Phelps and Carl Lewis, composers Beethoven and Mozart, actors Tom Cruise, Bill Cosby and star of the screen and stage, rapper Will Smith ... If you're an adult with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), you're in very good company.

While these people have used ADHD as a secret ingredient in their success, the condition can nevertheless have a serious impact on your social, work and emotional life.

'ADHD is caused by differences in patterns of chemicals, called neurotransmitters, in certain parts of the brain,' says Gauteng-based clinical psychiatrist Dr Shabeer Jeeva, who not only specialises in the subject, he's also lived with the condition all his life.

Those with ADHD have below average levels of dopamine, which is necessary for attention and focus, and lower noradrenaline, which acts like the brakes of a car and controls impulsivity.

Will Smith is a classic example of what the impact of too few neurotransmitters can be. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine he described how he battled at school: 'I was the fun one who had trouble paying attention. Today they'd diagnose me as a child with ADHD. I was a B student who should've been getting an A – a classic underachiever. It was hard for me to read an entire book in two weeks. Today I buy a book and have someone read it for me on tape!'

James Thorburn, owner of Cape Realty International in Cape Town, can relate. 'I could never sit still for more than five

Does this sound like you?

You've got the dream job with great career prospects but somehow the fit is just not right. You feel confined by the desk, the nine-to-five hours, the meetings and the routine. You know what you need to do but you can't seem to focus, to put your head down and get on with things. But when you hit the dance floor you are the life and soul of the party.

You may just have Adult ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). To many

people the term ADHD means restless or listless children, unable to sit still or concentrate on a task.

This much is true, but it doesn't stop there. Very often – in 70% of cases – the condition carries through into adulthood.

'Many people think you outgrow it – you seldom do,' says Gauteng-based clinical psychiatrist Dr Shabeer Jeeva who, having lived with it all his life, has turned ADHD into a successful career.

Below, from left: Michael Phelps, Whoopi Goldberg, Bill Cosby, Beethoven and Will Smith made Adult ADHD their secret weapon.



YOU

minutes in class. School was really difficult. I left in grade 10 and ended up getting a technical matric through a technikon. I just did not fit the norm. When I started working I got involved in the IT industry.'

It was only at age 22, when he started researching and reading material that related to him, that James realised he was not alone. 'The more I read about ADHD, the more I could relate it to myself. I could see myself when certain things were described. It was a great relief.'

After sinking into depression in a nine-to-five job, James realised he had to find something more suited to his symptoms. He started up his own business, and now the flexible work environment allows him to be creative and entrepreneurial, and to manage his ADHD.

'I have short bursts of focus but I also have a lot of freedom. Sport is a huge coping method for me and I try to do it at least once or twice a day,' he says. He now sees his ADHD as a gift and advises anyone who would like to channel their energies in the most positive way possible to read *The Da Vinci Method* by Garret LoPorto (Media for your Mind Inc, available at Amazon.com).

In adulthood there are several co-morbidities (conditions in addition to the main disorder) that link in with ADHD. 'Ten percent of people become antisocial; 35% suffer from depression and 40% from an anxiety disorder, with 15% becoming bipolar. Another 50% to 60% risk getting involved in alcohol and drug abuse,' says Dr Jeeva.

Consider human torpedo Michael



Phelps, who has repeatedly smashed world and Olympic swimming records. Diagnosed with ADHD at nine, he was a distracted, inattentive pupil until his mother, Debbie, realised that swimming was the mechanism that kept him focused and disciplined. But his ascending star plunged for a while when he was snapped smoking marijuana and questions were raised as to whether this impulsive, risk-taking behaviour was linked to his ADHD.

But despite the obvious downsides of the condition, there are plenty of pluses. ‘We have a Ferrari brain and a bicycle brake,’ chuckles Dr Jeeva. ‘We are different and creative and fun to be with.’

ADHD adults are often very friendly, very enterprising and gregarious as well as being excellent entrepreneurs. The happy truth is that many extraordinary contributions to society have been made by people with ADHD – they have gone in directions that tend to complement their condition.

Just look at Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin empire, and a household name today. He was a restless, not-very-successful pupil, started his own magazine aged 16 and launched Virgin Records when he was 20. The rest is the stuff of legends: a billion-dollar empire,

which underlines the creative, energetic, thinking-out-of-the-box aspect of this neurological condition.

But it’s not an easy ride and Dr Jeeva says warning bells for Adult ADHD sufferers should sound when work and/or personal relationships start to suffer because of low self-esteem, inattentiveness and impulsive behaviour. Boredom and paralysing procrastination are also hallmarks of this condition.

‘This is where coaching can be invaluable in assisting you with time management, procrastination, organisation and financial management,’ advises Dr Jeeva. He recommends behavioural therapy and, in moderate and severe cases, medication, if the ADHD is preventing you from reaching your goals.

ADHD need not and should certainly not deter you or knock you off track. Rather, embrace it and use it to encourage yourself to greater, even different heights of those around you.

‘To truly believe in yourself and your abilities, don’t let small thinking hold you back from achieving big dreams,’ says James Thorburn.

And that is one of the secrets to successfully living with Adult ADHD: to recognise, acknowledge and take steps that can make it work for you.

WORK THAT ADHD!

COPING STRATEGIES FROM
DR SHABEER JEEVA

nature

- Exercise, if possible several times a day (a minimum of four times a week, 80-90% heart rate, 45-60 mins).
- Omegas 3-6-9 twice daily.
- Gingko biloba herbal supplement.
- Reduce carbohydrate intake and up protein intake with lentils, vegetables and egg white.
- Avoid nicotine, alcohol and substances containing caffeine.
- The impact of sugar is minimal in Adult ADHD.

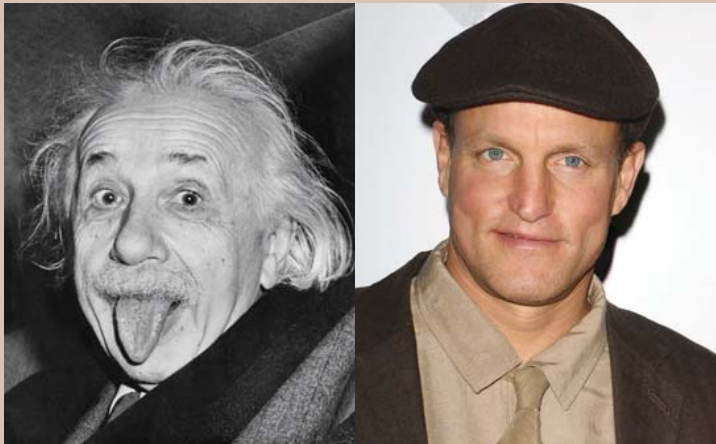


nurture

- Coaching is very important to help procrastination skills.
- Sleep an average of 8,25 hours daily.
- Human touch is important. Hugs are very helpful.
- Laugh at your mistakes.
- Don’t try to negotiate when hungry or tired. Eat and rest first to avoid confrontation.
- ADHD sufferers can often feel very alone. Let them know they are liked and loved.
- Meditation and/or yoga increase the neurotransmitters – which is good.



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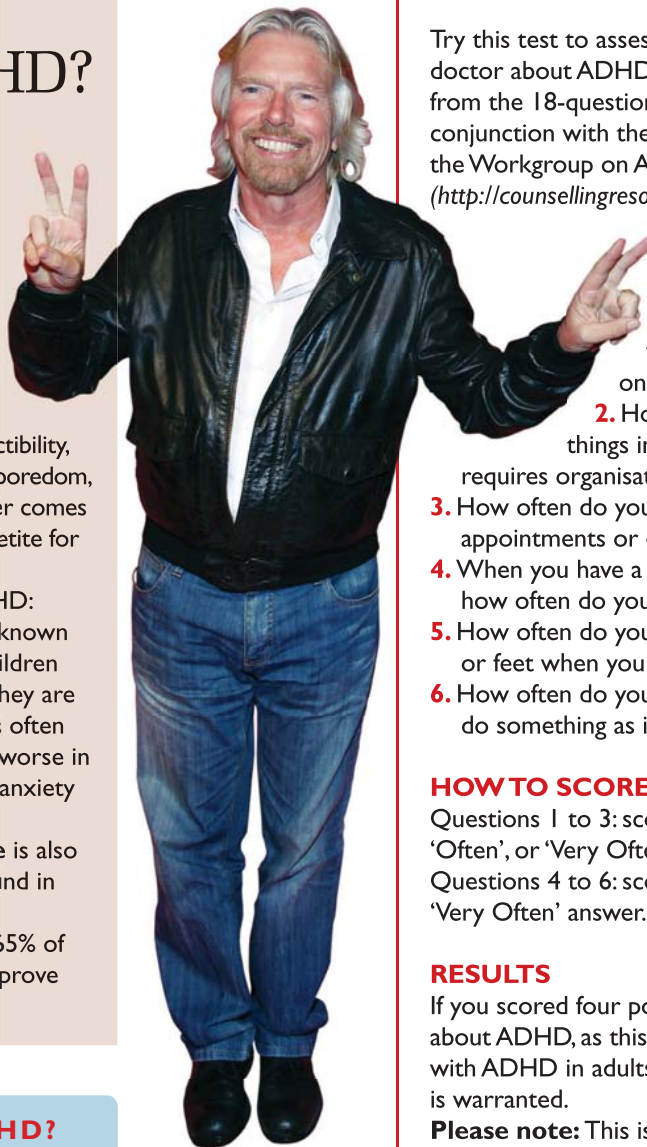


Adult ADHD needn't be a disability, as these stars have shown. From left, Cher, Robbie Williams, Michael Jordan, Albert Einstein and Woody Harrelson, with Richard Branson below.

Adult ADHD self-rating scale

What is ADHD?

- ADHD is classified as a neurobiological syndrome, starting in childhood and often continuing into adulthood.
- It is caused by genetics (hereditary) as well as birth trauma, low birth weight, maternal smoking, foetal alcohol syndrome and lead poisoning.
- Characteristics are easy distractibility, low tolerance for frustration or boredom, an impulse to say or do whatever comes to mind, overactivity and an appetite for situations with high intensity.
- There are three types of ADHD:
Inattentive type (previously known as ADD) presents in 25% of children and is more common in girls. They are dreamy and unfocused, and it is often misdiagnosed in school. It gets worse in adulthood when it presents as anxiety or depression.
Hyperactive-impulsive type is also known as 'boy's type' and is found in 10% of children.
Combined type presents in 65% of boys, and generally tends to improve in adulthood.



Try this test to assess whether you should ask your doctor about ADHD. These six questions were adapted from the 18-question symptom checklist developed in conjunction with the World Health Organisation and the Workgroup on Adult ADHD.
<http://counsellingresource.com/quizzes/adhd-asrs/index.html>

Answer either **Never**, **Sometimes**, **Often** or **Very Often**.

1. How often do you have trouble wrapping up the final details of a project once the challenging parts are done?
2. How often do you have difficulty getting things in order when you have to do a task that requires organisation?
3. How often do you have problems remembering appointments or obligations?
4. When you have a task that requires a lot of thought, how often do you avoid or delay getting started?
5. How often do you squirm or fidget with your hands or feet when you have to sit down for a long time?
6. How often do you feel overly active or compelled to do something as if you were driven by a motor?

HOW TO SCORE

Questions 1 to 3: score one point for every 'Sometimes', 'Often', or 'Very Often' answer.

Questions 4 to 6: score one point for every 'Often', or 'Very Often' answer.

RESULTS

If you scored four points or more, speak to your doctor about ADHD, as this indicates symptoms highly consistent with ADHD in adults and suggests that further investigation is warranted.

Please note: This is not a diagnostic test; a diagnosis of ADHD can be made only on the basis of a detailed history and mental-status examination. High scores on this screening quiz may also be related to other conditions, which must be ruled out before a diagnosis of ADHD can be made.

DO YOU HAVE ADHD?

Check yourself at http://www.addressources.org/article_adhd_checklist_amen.php