

ADHD Adults > Health & Nutrition

## EXERCISE & HEALTH

# Your ADHD Guide to Shedding Pounds

Executive function problems, sleep issues, and impulsivity can make losing weight tough. Here's how to stay fit, trim, and healthy with ADHD.



| By [Roberto Olivardia, Ph.D.](#) | ✓ [Verified](#) | Updated on April 8, 2022

[Click to Read 5 Comments](#) 

Losing weight with ADHD — or keeping it off — can be a real struggle. That's because eating, especially healthy eating, requires tapping into executive functions, which are not an ADHD strength.

Deciding what to cook, having the right ingredients in your cabinets and fridge, and planning and preparing a meal are all challenging for people with attention deficit. When people with ADHD feel overwhelmed, they skip meals or chow down on fast foods to avoid dealing with the executive challenges.

## Wired for Weight Gain

Several studies have shown that those with [ADHD](#) are prone to obesity and find it hard to lose weight. This is not surprising. [Adults with ADHD](#) aren't always aware of their food intake. Many eat while doing another activity — watching television, say, or even driving — so they lose track of the calories they consume. Some with attention deficit eat to find relief from stress, boredom, sadness, or even their racing thoughts.

Poor sleep habits, which many people with ADHD struggle with, also usually lead to weight problems. Sleep deprivation slows down metabolism, particularly that of carbohydrates. Your body holds on to fat and burns fewer calories. In addition, when our bodies are deprived of sleep, a hormone called leptin decreases. This deficiency increases your appetite and makes you feel less satisfied after eating a meal or a snack. Another hormone called ghrelin, which increases your appetite, rises.

Search for

**ADHD SELF TEST**

**WELLBUTRIN ADHD**

**VYVANSE VS ADDERALL FOR ADHD**

**10 FOODS TO REVERSE ADHD**

So what's a person with ADHD to do if he wants to eat healthily and lose a few pounds? Here are some winning strategies:

*[Get This Free Download: [Our Guide to a Delicious \(and ADHD-Friendly!\) Diet](#)]*

1. Spend one hour every Sunday night planning your meals for the week. Schedule the times when you should

eat. For instance, on Monday:

- 8 a.m.: Egg whites, bagel, slice of cheese
- 10:30 a.m.: Apple
- 1 p.m.: Ham and cheese sandwich with popcorn.

A detailed schedule lets you list the ingredients you will require for the week. Post your schedule in the kitchen on a dry-erase board.

**2. Eat breakfast and lots of protein.** If you skip breakfast, it may mean you have gone 16 to 18 hours without food. This sets off a cycle of conserving fat and lowering metabolism, while increasing the craving for fats and carbs. Studies have shown that eating breakfast increases short-term memory and attention.

Search for

If you include a protein source with your breakfast — grilled chicken, eggs, or plain yogurt — you are less likely to be hungry an hour after eating. Protein is brain food, enabling the neurotransmitters in our brains to work efficiently. This boosts memory, concentration, and attention.

**3. Get the right amount of sleep to lose weight.** We tend to associate sleeping with being unproductive, but this is not the case. Proper sleep helps maintain proper hormonal levels related to eating. This results in accurate hunger and satiety cues. It also keeps our metabolism running at a healthy rate, allowing our bodies to burn calories efficiently.

**4. Plan stimulating activities when you feel bored.** Many people with ADHD binge or impulsively eat at night. If you do, have three or four things written down that you can refer to when feeling bored. Some suggestions include:

- Work on an art project
- Call a friend
- Take a short walk
- Read an article or book
- Consider doing anything that stimulates or soothes you

*[Click to Read: “My Amazing ADHD Weight Loss Story”]*

**5. Slow down your eating and monitor how much you consume.** Take a couple of deep breaths before a meal to calm down and to increase your mindfulness. Dish out a portion of your meal on your plate and walk away from the pot, pan, or casserole. You’ll be more aware of how much you’re eating if you have to get up for another helping. Put your fork or spoon down after each mouthful. Do not pick up the utensil for another bite until you have chewed and swallowed your last bite.

Monitor how much you eat while you prepare and cook food. It is tempting to snack while you cook, but don’t lose track of how much you’ve consumed. Some people actually eat half a meal before they even sit down to

dinner. If you do eat while prepping a meal, adjust your portion when you sit down to lunch or dinner.

**6. Slim down the size of your plates and bowls.** Studies show that the size of the bowls and plates you eat from affects your perception of how much you eat. The solution is a no-brainer: Use smaller plates and bowls at home. Many people find that their hunger is satisfied only when they have eaten everything on their plate. Bigger plates mean more food, and more calories.

People with ADHD often follow the “see-food” diet. If they see food, they eat it. When going out to eat, ask the waitress to put half of your meal in a doggie bag, before it arrives at your table. Not only will you eat less, you will have leftovers.

**7. Make losing weight a group thing.** Find a friend or significant other who has the same goals as you, and lose weight together. You can hold each other accountable. Friends tend to stick with a plan because they don’t want to disappoint each other. Go beyond finding a friend: Put together a support system of people who understand how important it is for you to achieve your goals.

**8. Be honest with yourself.** Know the foods you shouldn’t buy because you overindulge. The regular-sized package of Oreos may be hard to resist, but it is smarter to buy the smaller pack that contains fewer cookies.

Never go to the supermarket hungry, or you will likely buy foods high in fat, sugars, and simple carbs. Write a list at home, take it with you, and stick to it. You will be more mindful and less impulsive about what you buy when you aren’t lured by all the choices in the supermarket. Stock your pantry with healthy staples like nuts, low-fat yogurt, high-protein cereals, lean meats, vegetables, and fruits. If you use eating to stimulate yourself, chew gum instead when you have the urge. You will add sensory input without adding unwanted calories.

Healthy eating and losing weight are challenging for anyone. Some days it will be harder than others to pull it off. Know that ADHD makes it tougher to lose weight. Do not shame yourself for being overweight or having an eating binge. Adults with ADHD tend to take on shame, more than those without the condition, for things that they have little control over. If you do not lose weight at the rate you expected to, don’t give up. Use these tips and your support system to keep you on track. You can do it.

*[Read This Next: [The Dopamine Deficiency That’s Sabotaging Your Diet](#)]*



# The ADDITUDE Commitment

ADDitude collaborates closely with leading medical experts to publish accurate, clear, and authoritative content that millions of readers trust and share.

[REVIEW OUR EDITORIAL PROCESS](#)

[MEET OUR MEDICAL ADVISORY PANEL](#)



ADDitude verifies the factual accuracy of all new content.



Sources are cited for all scientific research and findings.



Content is periodically reviewed and updated to reflect new health insights.



We strive to feature diverse voices and experiences.

Your Privacy Choices A small blue icon with a white checkmark and an 'x' inside a circle.

AdChoices A small blue icon of a play button with a white 'x' inside.

Copyright © 1998 - 2024 WebMD LLC. All rights reserved. Your use of this site is governed by our [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). ADDitude does not provide medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The material on this web site is provided for educational purposes only.