



## Exercise Guide for ADHD

### Introduction

Exercise can be a powerful tool for managing ADHD symptoms. Research shows that physical activity can improve focus, reduce impulsivity, and enhance overall mood. This guide will provide evidence of the benefits of exercise for individuals with ADHD, along with practical tips on starting and maintaining a healthy exercise routine.

### Benefits of Exercise for ADHD

#### 1. Improved Focus and Attention

- **Research Findings:** Studies indicate that exercise increases levels of neurotransmitters like dopamine and norepinephrine, which play a critical role in attention and focus.
- **Impact:** Regular physical activity has been shown to enhance concentration and reduce distractibility in both children and adults with ADHD.

#### 2. Reduction in Hyperactivity and Impulsivity

- **Research Findings:** Physical activity helps channel excess energy, reducing restlessness and impulsive behaviours.
- **Impact:** Engaging in structured exercise routines can lead to decreased hyperactivity, making it easier to manage ADHD symptoms.

#### 3. Enhanced Mood and Reduced Anxiety

- **Research Findings:** Exercise promotes the release of endorphins, which elevate mood and reduce stress.
- **Impact:** Regular exercise can decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression, common comorbid conditions in individuals with ADHD.

#### 4. Improved Executive Functioning

- **Research Findings:** Exercise has been linked to better planning, organising, and task management skills.
- **Impact:** These improvements contribute to better overall functioning in daily life.

### Getting Started with Exercise

#### Tips for Beginners

- **Set Realistic Goals**
  - **Start Small:** Begin with manageable goals, such as 10-15 minutes of physical activity a day.
  - **Incremental Increases:** Gradually increase the duration and intensity as you become more comfortable.



- Choose Enjoyable Activities
  - Find Your Passion: Select activities that you enjoy, whether it's dancing, swimming, cycling, or hiking. Enjoyment increases the likelihood of sticking with the routine.
  - Variety: Mix different types of exercise to prevent boredom and work different muscle groups.
- Incorporate Physical Activity into Daily Life
  - Active Commuting: Walk or cycle instead of driving or taking public transport.
  - Household Chores: Treat cleaning, gardening, or yard work as exercise opportunities.

### Building Up to a Healthy Routine

- Create a Schedule
  - Consistency: Aim for regular exercise on specific days and times to establish a routine. If you fall out of this routing, it doesn't mean you cannot restart it!
  - Flexibility: Allow for flexibility in your schedule to accommodate unexpected events but strive to maintain consistency overall.
- Set SMART Goals
  - Specific: Define clear and precise goals (e.g., "Walk 30 minutes daily").
  - Measurable: Track your progress (e.g., distance, time, frequency).
  - Achievable: Set realistic and attainable goals based on your current fitness level.
  - Relevant: Choose goals that align with your interests and ADHD management.
  - Time-Bound: Set a timeframe to achieve your goals (e.g., within 3 months).
- Try to Include Different Types of Exercise
  - Cardiovascular Activities: Running, cycling, swimming, or brisk walking to boost heart health and improve mood.
  - Strength Training: Weightlifting, resistance bands, or bodyweight exercises to build muscle and improve overall strength.
  - Flexibility and Balance: Yoga or Pilates to enhance flexibility, reduce stress, and improve mind-body connection.



- Find a Workout Buddy/Body Double
  - Social Motivation: Exercising with a friend or group can increase motivation and accountability.
  - Support System: Friends can offer encouragement and make workouts more enjoyable.

## Overcoming Barriers to Exercise

- Time Management
  - Break It Up: If you struggle to find long blocks of time, split exercise into shorter sessions throughout the day. 6 x 5-minute walks are as effective as 1 x 30-minute walk
  - Prioritise Exercise: Schedule it like an appointment to ensure it becomes a non-negotiable part of your routine.
- Stay Motivated
  - Track Progress: Use apps or journals to record achievements and celebrate milestones.
  - Set Rewards: Treat yourself to small rewards for reaching your exercise goals to maintain motivation.
- Dealing with Setbacks
  - Be Kind to Yourself: Understand that setbacks happen; getting back on track matters.
  - Adjust Goals: If necessary, modify your goals to make them more achievable.

## Building a Sustainable Exercise Routine

### 1. Gradual Increase

- Intensity and Duration: Slowly increase the intensity and duration of your workouts to avoid burnout or injury.
- Listen to Your Body: Pay attention to how your body feels and rest when needed.

### 2. Mixing Up Workouts

- Prevent Boredom: Rotate different exercises and try new activities to keep things interesting.
- Engage Different Muscles: Varying workouts ensure comprehensive fitness and prevent overuse injuries.

### 3. Consider Professional Guidance



- Personal Trainers: If needed, consider working with a personal trainer who understands ADHD to create a personalised exercise plan.
- Exercise Classes: Join classes for structured workouts and social interaction.

## **Conclusion**

Exercise is a valuable tool in managing ADHD symptoms and improving overall quality of life. By incorporating regular physical activity into your routine, you can experience enhanced focus, reduced impulsivity, and improved mood. Start small, set realistic goals, and choose activities you enjoy. Remember, consistency is key, and with time, exercise can become a rewarding and integral part of your ADHD management strategy.

## **Resources**

[NHS Physical Activity Guidelines](#)