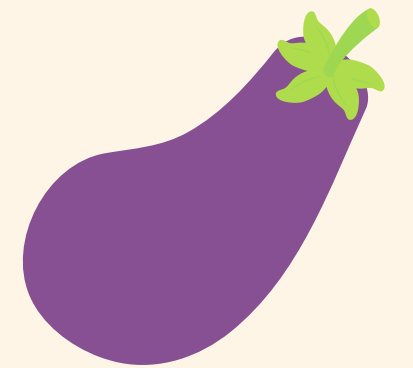
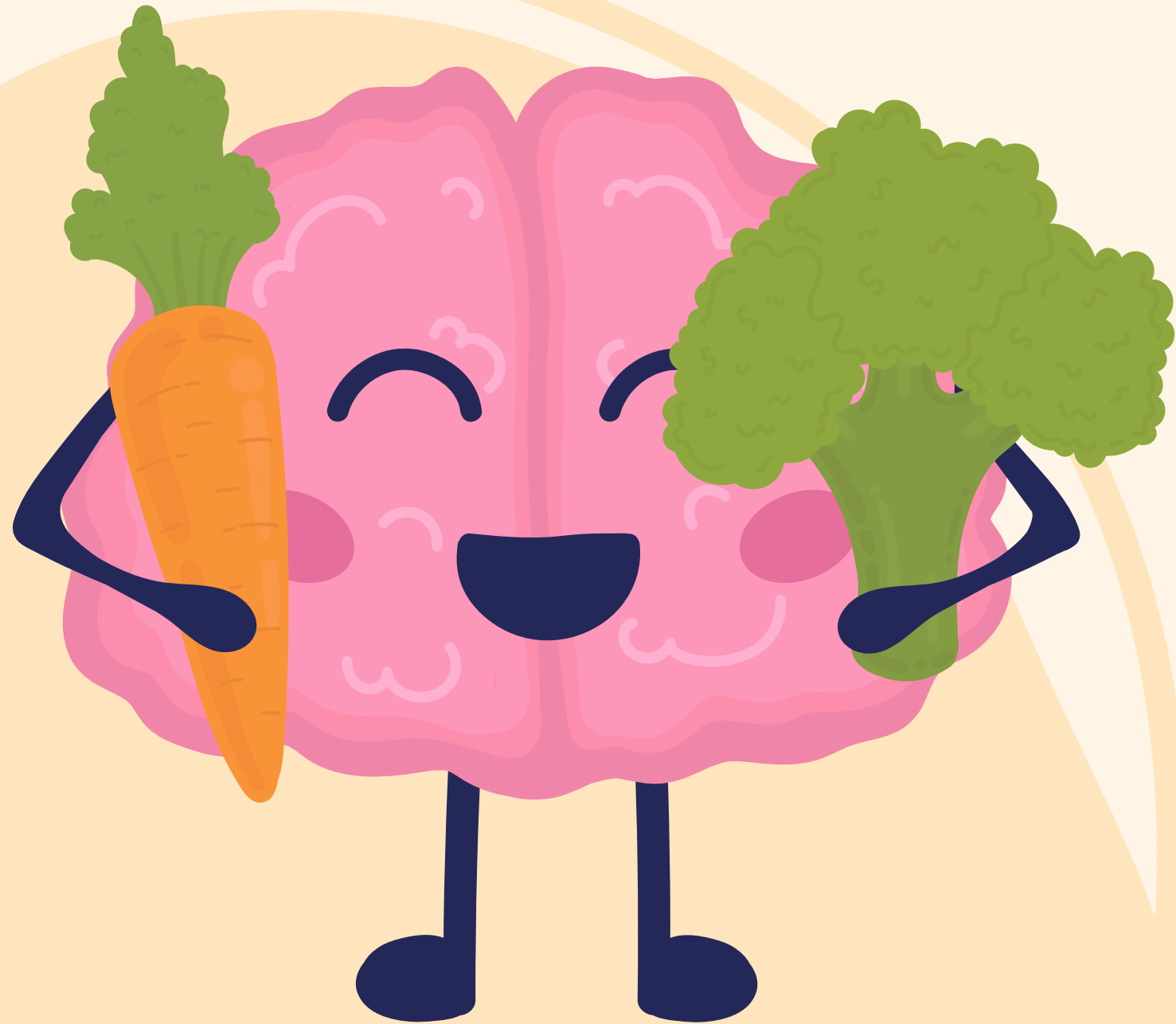


By: Becca King, MS, RDN, LDN



Eating & ADHD



Today's Discussion



ADHD Overview

How ADHD can present differently in females

ADHD Treatments & Medication Side Effects

Link between EDs & ADHD

Is there a diet for ADHD?

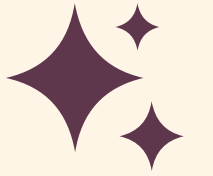
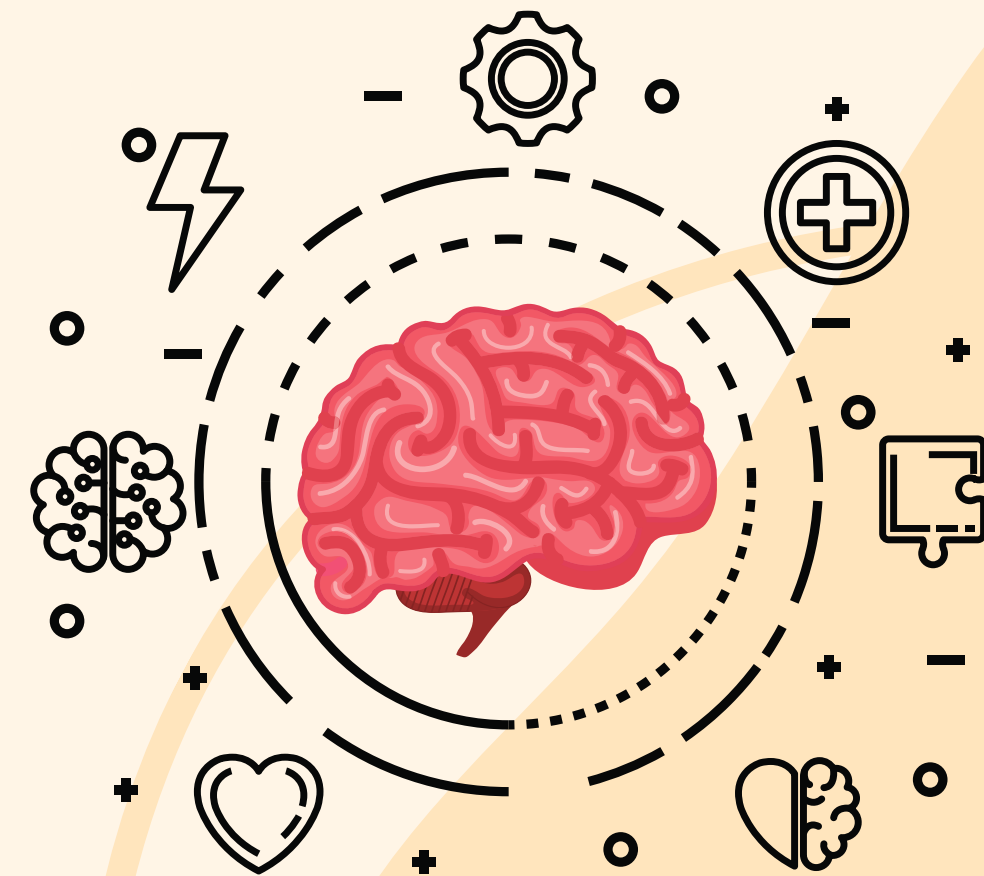
Eating challenges with ADHD

Nutrients for ADHD

What is ADHD?

"Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurological disorder that impacts the parts of the brain that help us plan, focus on, and execute tasks. ADHD symptoms vary by sub-type — inattentive, hyperactive, or combined — and are often more difficult to diagnose in girls and adults."

ADDitude Magazine



Three types of ADHD

Hyperactive/Impulsive Type

- Fidgets, taps hands or feet, or can't sit still
- Leave seat when expected to remain seated (i.e. meetings)
- Feels restless
- Unable to engage in leisure activities quietly
- Appears "on the go" or "driven by motor"
- Talks excessively
- Completes people's sentences
- Difficulty waiting in lines or to speak in conversation
- Interrupts or intrudes others

Inattentive Type

- Struggles with attention to details or makes careless mistakes
- Difficulty sustaining attention in tasks
- Doesn't seem to listen when spoken directly too
- Starts tasks but loses focus, gets sidetracked, and may not finish task
- Difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- Avoids, dislikes or reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort
- Loses things needed to complete a task
- Easily distracted by extraneous stimuli including unrelated thoughts
- Forgetful in daily activities

Combined Type

- Has 6 out of 9 symptoms from each sub-type



Executive Function

Organizing, prioritizing, & activating tasks

Managing frustration & modulating emotions

Focusing, sustaining, & shifting attention

Utilizing working memory & accessing recall

Regulating alertness, sustaining effort & processing speed

Monitoring & self-regulating action



How ADHD Shows Up in Females

Inattention

May appear easily distracted, disorganized, overwhelmed and lack in effort or motivation.

Sypmtoms

May become more apparents later especially during social or educational transition.

Hormonal Changes

Symptoms exacerbated by hormonal changes.

Masking

Compensatory behaviors to hide symptoms can delay diagnosis

Hyperactive

Severity of symptoms may be lower in females compared to males.

Emotional dysregulation

May be more severe in females compared to males



How ADHD Shows Up in Females

Substance Misuse

May turn to alcohol or cannabis to cope with emotions, social isolation, and rejection

Comorbid conditions

ASD, bipolar, depression, anxiety, OCD, personality disorders, & substance use disorders

ADHD Presentation

More likely to internalize symptoms so they may not present the same behavioral problems as males



Masking

Compensatory behaviors to hide symptoms can delay diagnosis

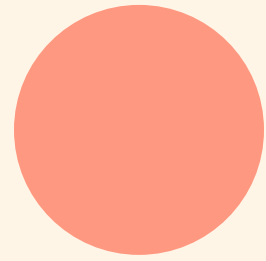
Eating disorders

People with ADHD are at an increased risk for all EDs.

Emotional dysregulation

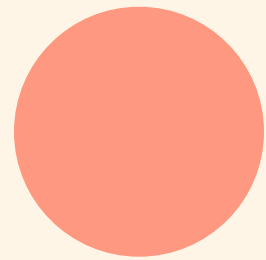
May be more severe in females compared to males

ADHD Treatment Options



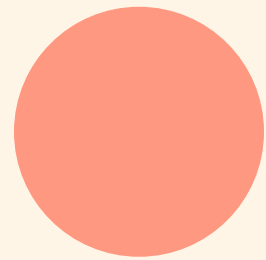
Stimulant Medication

These help increase production of dopamine & norepinephrine. Amphetamines, methylphenidates, lisdexamfetamine & dexamethylphenidate.



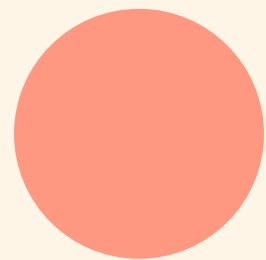
Non-stimulant Medication

Often prescribed when stimulants don't work or the side effects are too difficult to manage. These help increase the production of norepinephrine.



Therapy

CBT, psychotherapy, and behavior therapy can be helpful especially when paired with medication.



Movement


For a very small percent of people with ADHD, movement can be just as effective as medication for managing ADHD.




Stimulant Medication Side Effects



- Weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Dry mouth
- Headaches
- Sleeplessness
- Nervousness
- Irritability
- Upset stomach
- Tics & personality changes (less common)
- Side effects tend to be stronger for these types of meds
- Your doctor may need to adjust the dose or type of medication if these side effects interfere with your daily life
- Avoid megadoses (>2,000+ mg) of Vitamin C an hour before and after taking stimulant meds. Vitamin C can interfere with absorption.

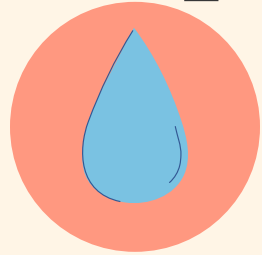


Non- Stimulant Medication Side Effects



- Nausea & stomach aches
- Decreased appetite
- Weight loss
- Fatigue
- Drowsiness
- Mood swings

Tips for Eating on Meds



Liquids

Smoothies, protein shakes, Greek yogurt, soups, etc. might be easier to tolerate especially if chewing feels unappealing.



Anchor Meals

If eating is really challenging on meds, try eating larger breakfasts and dinners as your appetite might be better at those times.



Try grazing

If large meals are unappealing on meds, try smaller frequent snacks throughout the day.



Have ready to eat foods

Stock up on foods that require little to no prep to eat so you'll actually eat



Find tolerable foods

Get curious and find foods you can tolerate on meds. These might be more bland foods or "kids" foods like a PB&J or Mac n' cheese.

Eating Disorders & ADHD

In ADHDers, the most common eating disorder is Binge Eating Disorders followed by Bulimia Nervosa.

“

ADHDers have a 3-fold risk of developing an ED & have more severe ED symptoms

Nazar et al. (2016)

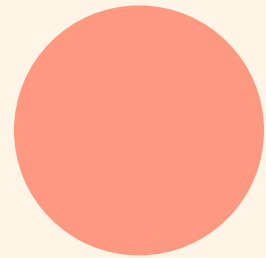
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Another study found ADHDers had a 3-6x greater risk of an ED

Curtin et al (2013)

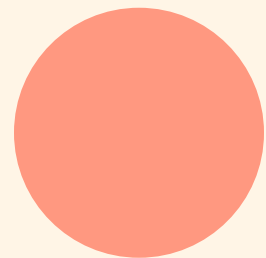
No current studies on anorexia nervosa and ADHD.

How ADHD influences eating disorder behaviors



Biological Factors

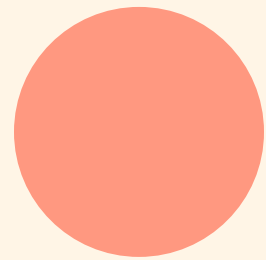
- Seeking dopamine & lack proper "brakes" to regulate eating
- Restriction can make foods even more rewarding
- Bingeing/purging common after dopamine-related activity to manage dopamine drop.
- ADHD brain slower to absorb glucose --> increase in sugar & simple carbs
- Serotonin from carbs & sugar can provide sense of calm
- EDs & ADHD have a genetic component



Cognitive Factors

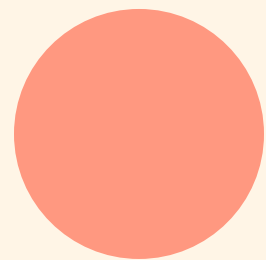
- **Lower interoceptive awareness:** struggle with recognizing hunger/fullness cues
- **Executive function deficits**
- Difficulty with decision making or impulsive
- Procrastin-eating
- Food= source of stimulation or dopamine
- Restricting to avoid executive task of eating

How ADHD influences eating disorder behaviors



Behavioral Factors

- Impulsivity
- Struggles with self-regulating
- Poor sleep habits
- **Skipping meals/snacks** makes you more likely to overeat at your next meal/snack
- **Hyperfocus** --> hours without eating and then suddenly needing food NOW
- More likely to eat while distracted
- **Not eating enough on medication and feeling ravenous when it wears off**



Emotional Factors

- **Turning to food for negative emotions:** anger, sadness, depression, rejection
- **Eating for stimulation when bored**
- Food= reward or pleasure
- **Sensory aspects can be soothing or offensive**
- Preoccupation with food as a way to ground self
- Using food to distract from racing thoughts



Diets for ADHD



- **There have been no dietary intervention studies in adults with ADHD.**
- **Many of the diets suggested for improving ADHD symptoms are extremely restrictive, require a lot of time and resources, and do not have strong evidence to show that they work or that they are sustainable long-term.**
- **Many of these diets rely on fears around gluten, soy, dairy, preservatives, and food dyes.**
- **Any diet that claims to heal ADHD is a red flag.**
- **In reality, the diet recommendations for ADHD fall in line with Gentle Nutrition.**

Sugar & ADHD

Sugar does not cause ADHD! While sugar often gets blamed for making ADHD symptoms worse, it's actually big fluctuations in blood sugar can make ADHD symptoms worse.

Does that mean you need to cut out sugar? NOPE!

- Trying to replace a piece of chocolate with a vegetable isn't going to give your brain the dopamine it wants.
- Restricting sugar/carbs makes them even more rewarding (hello dopamine)
- Restriction paired with poor self-regulation means you'll likely overeat or binge when you do eat sweets

So what can you do when you eat foods higher in added sugars?

- Pair it with a fat and/or a protein to help keep your blood sugar stable
- Make peace with sugar & carbs



Eating for Stimulation

How do you know if you're eating for stimulation?

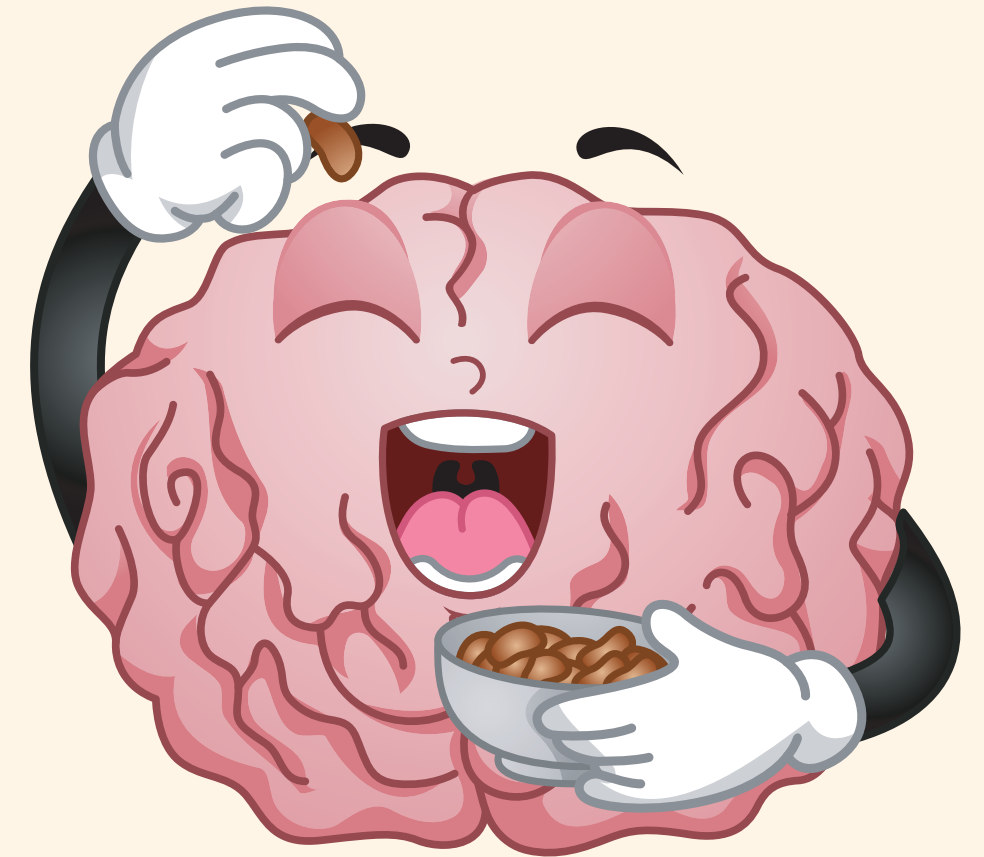
- Often, it can feel like eating because your bored
- It can feel like needing to do something with your hands or your mouth
- Food is often used alongside other activities (like watching tv, studying, working) to help an ADHDer focus on that task or make it more enjoyable

What foods can provide stimulation?

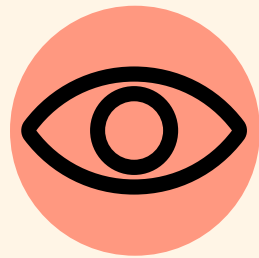
- Carbs & sugar= dopamine & serotonin
- The sensory experience of eating can also provide stimulation
 - different flavors
 - crunchy foods
 - carbonated beverages
 - anything containing caffeine

Is eating for stimulation bad?

- **NO**
- Food can be a part of your Dopamine Toolkit (See handout to build your Dopamine Toolkit)
- It can lead to overeating or bingeing when it's you're only source of stimulation



Tips for Remembering to Eat



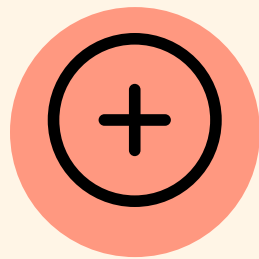
Visual Cues

Out of sight, out of mind. Keeping foods visible can help cue you to eat. Examples: keeping food at workstation or out on kitchen counter.



Schedule Eating

Schedule or block off time for eating so you actually have time to do it.



Pair with activity

Pair eating with taking meds, drinking water, feeding kids or pets. Try to avoid pairing with distracting activities, like watching tv.



Use alarms or reminders

Set alarms on your phone, smart watch, smart home device to cue you to eat or at least to pause and check in with yourself. Label the alarms so you know what they're for.

Tips for Cooking Overwhelm

- Identify what part(s) you find overwhelming, dread, etc.
- Find ways to simplify or delegate those part(s)

Here's a few ideas:

- order groceries for pick-up or delivery
- meal delivery services
- buy pre-cut produce
- utilize your freezer
- go to store more frequently
- get others involved
- use ADHD-friendly kitchen gadgets like the InstantPot, airfryer or crockpot

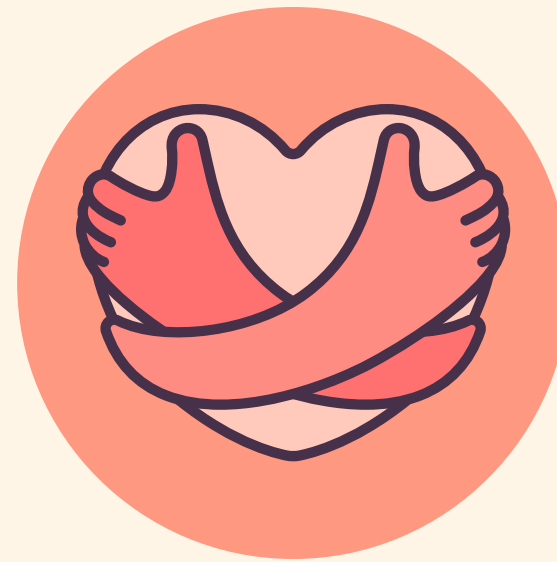


Why Intuitive Eating is great for ADHDers?



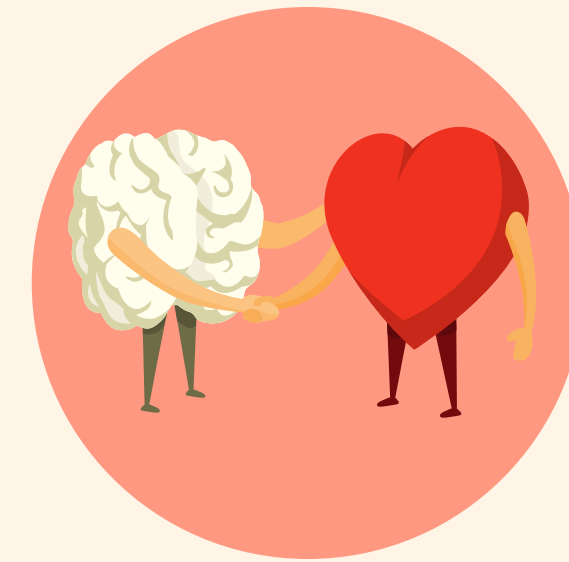
Mindfulness

Mindfulness practices have been shown to help with manage ADHD. IE can help ADHDers be more mindful with eating.



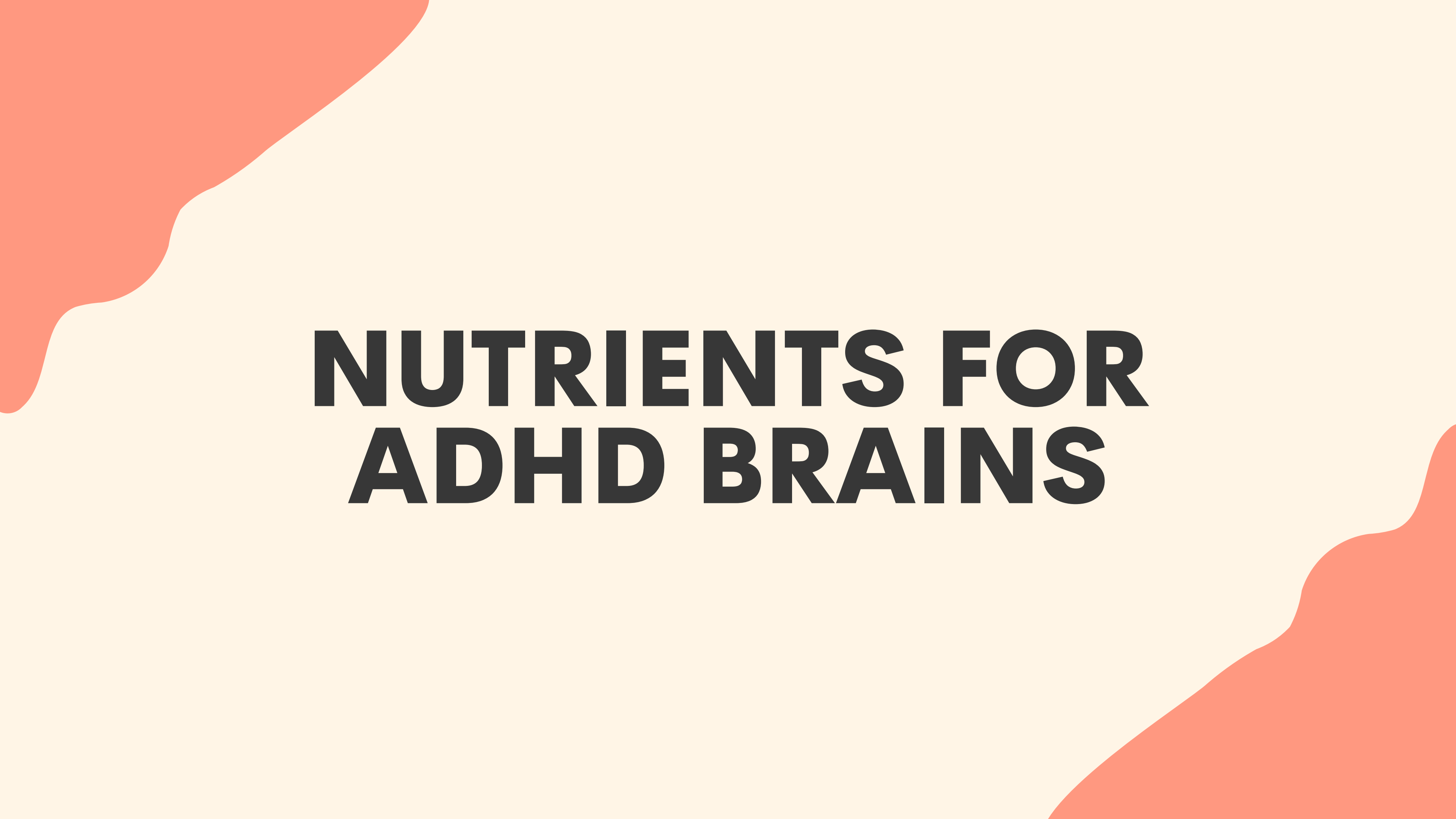
Self-compassion

ADHDers can have lower levels of self-esteem. IE has been shown to improve self-esteem.



Working with your brain

IE gives you permission to work with your brain to find a way of eating that works for you without judgement, guilt, or shame.



NUTRIENTS FOR ADHD BRAINS

Omega-3s

- most widely researched supplement for **ADHD**
- help improve hyperactivity, impulsivity, and concentration
- **Food sources:**
 - cold water fish= best source
 - nuts (flaxseed, chia seeds, walnuts)
 - plant oils (flaxseed oil, soybean oil, canola oil)
 - fortified foods (some eggs, yogurt, milk, soy beverages, and juices)

Omega-3 supplements:

What to look for in fish oil supplement:

- 1.5-2x EPA than DHA
- 2,000mg-5,000mg for adults
- talk to doctor to determine best dosage
- capsule & liquid are best form



Side effects:

- fish burps & bad breath
- nausea, heartburn, diarrhea, rash, nose bleeds

Ways to increase intake through food:

- eat fish 2x/wk
- add ground flaxseed to smoothies or oatmeal
- add edamame to trail mix or as salad topper



Additional Nutrients



Iron:

- low iron may affect sleep
- **diet is the safest way to increase iron levels**
- animal proteins, fortified cereals, whole grains, dark leafy greens, legumes are sources
- pair plant-based iron with vitamin-C to increase absorption



Zinc:

- regulates dopamine
- may make methylphenidate more effective
- supplementation can improve impulsivity & hyperactivity
- beef, spinach, pumpkin seeds, shrimp
- low zinc can alter reduce taste & smell



Magnesium:

- involved in attention, helps with sleep and relaxation
- found in dark leafy greens, nuts, seeds, and beans

Ask health care provider to do blood work before stating supplement regimen. Toxicity can occur with these minerals!!



Summary



In addition to all the diet culture messages, ADHDers experience issues with executive functioning, emotional dysregulation, and medication side effects that can make eating and having a good relationship with food challenging.

Intuitive Eating not only helps break free from dieting and disordered eating but also help ADHDers find a way to eat that works for them!



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Managing Cooking Overwhelm

Below are a general guide for the steps of cooking. Review the steps and circle the steps you find overwhelming or dread. Answer questions on following page.

Steps of cooking:

1. Meal planning

- Determine what meals you're making
 - Card method
 - Spinner
- Make list and bring it to grocery store

2. Shopping

- Go to store
- Get everything on list
- Go home
- Put away groceries

3. Cooking

- Produce
 - Clean
 - Chop, cut, etc.
 - Put away/cook
- Cooking grains
 - Boil water
 - Measure grain
 - Cook

4. Dishes

- Cleaning
- Putting in dishwasher
- Running dishwasher
- Put away

Managing Cooking Overwhelm

1. Cooking Process

a. What parts of the cooking process do you find overwhelming, dread, or take too much time?

2. What are some ways you can make the cooking process less overwhelming? (Ex. meal delivery service, ordering groceries, delegating, etc.)

MY ULTIMATE DOPAMINE MENU

ADHD brains constantly seek stimulation. Use this menu to find activities that give you dopamine.

Fill each box with things that give you stimulation or dopamine. Get curious and try new things to add to the list over time!

APPETIZERS

Quick activities: coffee or playing with dog

SIDES

Paired with other tasks: fidget toys, music, chewing gum

MAINS

Fulfilling activities that need more effort: solo dance party, going for a walk, working on a project

DESSERTS

Activities that are easier but less fulfilling: scrolling social media, enjoying your favorite candy

SPECIALS

Bigger events that happen on occasion: going to a concert, going out with friends, traveling