

## **YOGA THERAPY FOR ADULTS WITH ADHD**

Faith Halter, [www.InsightfulTransitions.com](http://www.InsightfulTransitions.com), (Sept. 28, 2010)

### **DESCRIPTION**

**Definition:** Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neuropsychiatric disorder that causes varying combinations of inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

ADHD begins in childhood and strongly manifests no later than adolescence, and usually sooner. The symptoms of ADHD are excessive, pervasive, and severely impair a person's functioning in at least two areas of his or her life. These are important distinctions because *virtually everyone experiences ADHD-like symptoms at least occasionally. If ADHD-like symptoms first appear in adulthood, then the person does not have ADHD, but rather some other disorder.*

ADHD is a situational disorder. People with ADHD tend to have prominent strengths and prominent weaknesses. The same characteristic (e.g., tendency to hyperfocus) may be an advantage in one situation and a disadvantage in another. This situational aspect of ADHD can generate great confusion both for those who have it and those around them, due to seeming inconsistencies in the behavior and performance levels of the person with ADHD.

**Adults:** When ADHD began receiving serious attention in the 1970s and 1980s, it was generally believed that children outgrew it. In the 1990s, studies began to indicate that ADHD symptoms continue throughout a person's lifetime, though they may lessen in severity. Estimates vary, but it seems that roughly 1/3 of children largely outgrow their ADHD, 1/3 experience mild-moderate symptoms as adults, and 1/3 continue to experience moderate-severe symptoms.<sup>1</sup>

In children, the typical areas of functional impairment include school, home life, and social skills. In adults, the life issues most severely affected by ADHD include:

- Educational achievement
- Employment and career advancement
- Sexual behavior
- Cohabiting or marital relationships
- Parenting
- Driving
- Money management
- Health maintenance

To put this in more graphic terms, **ADHD adults are:**<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adult ADHD, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/adult-adhd/DS01161>.

<sup>2</sup> David Giwerc & Barbara Luther, *SIMPLY ADHD* (ADD Coach Academy, copyright 2005-2009), p. 99-38.

- 2/3rds more likely to have been fired from jobs
- 3 times more likely to have impulsively quit jobs
- 1/3 more likely to have chronic employment difficulties
- 50% more likely to have changed jobs in a given period
- Under-earning by \$11,000 for high school grads and \$4,000 for college grads
- Twice as likely to separate or divorce
- Likely to abuse substances earlier and longer if not properly medicated
- Likely to have 1-4 comorbidities (co-existing conditions) during their lifetimes, such as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, learning disabilities (dyslexia and processing disorders), antisocial disorders, substance abuse or addictions, sleep problems

## MEDICAL PERSPECTIVE

### DIAGNOSIS

**Diagnostic history and terminology:** THE DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL OF MENTAL DISORDERS (DSM) includes standardized diagnostic criteria for many psychiatric disorders. A precursor to the current diagnosis of ADHD first appeared in the 1968 update of the DSM as "hyperkinetic reaction of childhood."

The 1980 update changed the name to "attention deficit disorder" and treated hyperactivity as a subset. The most recent DSM update, in 1994, reinstated hyperactivity as a central characteristic and changed the official diagnostic category to "attention deficit hyperactivity disorder."

The current DSM specifies that ADHD must appear by age 7. However, it is generally accepted that symptoms may not become severe in some people until adolescence, and so the DSM criteria are considered generally applicable for that age group, too. The next DSM update is expected to formally recognize ADHD as a diagnosis for adults as well as children, and adapt the diagnostic criteria accordingly.

Formal diagnosis has to be done by a psychiatrist or psychologist. Many other professionals are qualified to make referrals to diagnosticians and to be consulted about diagnosing ADHD, even though they may not make an official medical diagnosis.

There has been considerable controversy about whether ADHD is truly a distinct disorder, despite its evolving inclusion in the DSM since 1968. It was not until 1998 that the American Medical Association formally concluded that the ADHD diagnostic criteria are based on extensive research and lead to a diagnosis with a high degree of reliability when applied appropriately.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Attention-deficit_hyperactivity_disorder), [www://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Attention-deficit\\_hyperactivity\\_disorder](http://www://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Attention-deficit_hyperactivity_disorder)

**Diagnostic criteria<sup>4</sup>:** As noted above, the current DSM for ADHD applies only to children and adolescents. There is heavy emphasis on issues involving school and other activities that apply to those age groups, rather than to adults. In addition to their different life circumstances from children, adults with ADHD tend to display much less physical hyperactivity.

Diagnostic criteria for adults: Diagnosing ADHD depends largely on subjective information provided by the patient and close family members and others who are familiar with the patient's behaviors and patterns. Specialists in adult ADHD employ a number of different tests to supplement the DSM criteria for children and adolescents.

Typical adult diagnostic symptoms are listed below, along with "soft signs" that reflect the person's internal experience and/or how others tend to see him or her. (The DSM categorizes inattention as one category of symptoms, and combines hyperactivity and impulsivity into a second category of symptoms.)

#### INATTENTION:

1. Easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
2. Frequent, sometimes costly errors at work, despite "knowing better"
3. Failure to pay adequate attention to instructions or directions before beginning a project or task
4. Poor follow-through on commitments to others
5. Frequent procrastination
6. Chronic lateness and poor sense of time

*Soft signs of inattention:* low self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness; seen by self and others as not living up to full potential, that they could do better if they only made more effort; frequent memory lapses and lapses of attention

#### HYPERACTIVITY:

1. Fidgety, especially when not directly engaged in an activity or conversation
2. Always moving and unable to relax
3. Difficulty engaging in balanced conversation (e.g., excessive talking, takes a long time to get a point across, inappropriate clowning or repartee, diverging into tangents)

#### IMPULSIVITY:

1. Impatient during conversations; blurts out answers before hearing the full question; says things without thinking them through; interrupts for fear of forgetting an idea
2. Irritable and impatient when there is a need to wait (in line, for other people, in traffic)
3. Does not see or understand other peoples' boundaries; seen as socially inept, sometimes even in close relationships
4. Impulsive decision-making

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<sup>4</sup> The material for this section comes primarily from two sources: Russell A. Barkley, ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER IN ADULTS: THE LATEST ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT STRATEGIES (Jones and Bartlett, 2010) and Giwerc & Luther, op.cit.

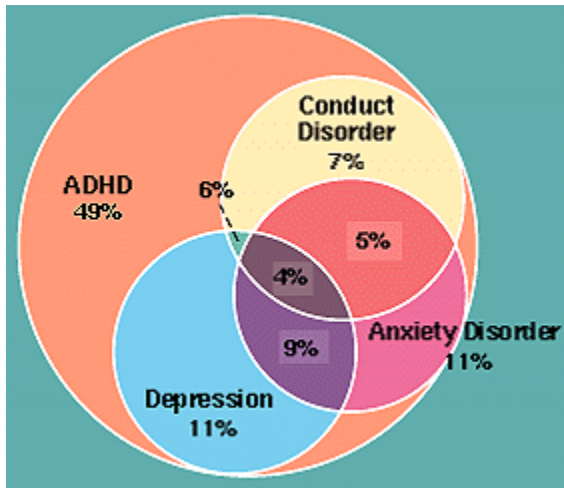
*Soft signs of hyperactivity and/or impulsivity:* “good starters but bad finishers,” regretful spontaneous purchases, thrill-seeking behavior, fast driving and road rage.

**Comorbidity (co-existing conditions):** Another factor that complicates diagnosis and treatment of adult ADHD is the frequency of co-existing conditions, known as comorbidity. The co-existing condition may partially mask ADHD, or vice versa. A study by the World Health Organization found that adults are more likely to be treated for the co-existing conditions than for ADHD.<sup>5</sup>

The type of comorbidity seems to vary according to whether the person first received an ADHD diagnosis as a child or as an adult.<sup>6</sup>

People receiving an ADHD diagnosis as an adult are more likely to be at risk for anxiety and/or depression.

People receiving an ADHD diagnosis as a child are more likely to be at risk for antisocial behavior, drug use and abuse, reduced educational attainment, poorer employment history and lower socioeconomic status.



*This chart shows results of a 1996 study that compared children with and without ADHD.<sup>7</sup> As indicated, about half (51%) of the ADHD children had at least one comorbidity, with some having all three of the co-existing conditions studied.*

*By contrast, two recent studies of adults funded by the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health found that more than 80% of the ADHD adults had at least one other disorder, and more than 1/3 had at least three comorbid conditions.<sup>8</sup>*

It has not been established whether there is any cause-and-effect between time of diagnosis and type of co-existing condition. People diagnosed as adults may have had protective factors, such as higher intelligence or greater family support, that helped them to compensate for their ADHD while growing up.

## **CAUSES OF ADHD**

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization World Mental Health Survey Initiative, cited in Adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, op.cit. footnote 3 above.

<sup>6</sup> Barkley, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Biederman and Stephen Faraone, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Winter 1996), [http://www.hms.harvard.edu/hmni/On\\_The\\_Brain/Volume05/Number1/ADD.html](http://www.hms.harvard.edu/hmni/On_The_Brain/Volume05/Number1/ADD.html).

<sup>8</sup> Barkley, op. cit., p. 29.

**ADHD is a result of differences in brain development and functioning as compared to the normal population.** Heredity seems to be the primary factor in ADHD, with estimates of genetic contribution ranging as high as 78-94%; it appears that several genes are involved, rather than a single genetic marker.<sup>9</sup> Other causes are prenatal and/or early childhood brain trauma and environmental biohazards that affect the brain, such as maternal smoking or drinking during pregnancy and early exposure to lead.

**Neurobiology:** The typical symptoms of ADHD indicate that it is primarily caused by *abnormalities in the prefrontal cortex* of the brain. The prefrontal cortex is largely responsible for executive functions, such as verbal and nonverbal working memory, planning, impulse-control and sustained attentiveness. The prevailing theory is that the underlying reason for ADHD problems with executive function is an imbalance in one or both of these two neurotransmitters:

Dopamine, which improves attention and reduces hyperactivity; and

Norepinephrine, which improves executive function and may also control impulsivity.

These neurotransmitter imbalances help to explain why ADHD is situational. They affect our “reward centers” as well as our ability to focus and manage ourselves. People with ADHD often have trouble aligning their *intention* with their *attention*. In principle they may genuinely want to do something, but they don’t follow through because their neurological reward and/or attention centers are not being activated or are responding to inappropriate stimuli.

**Epidemiology:** An estimated 3-5% of adults in North America and Europe have ADHD. Only 10-15% of those adults have received a diagnosis. Thus, 85%-90% of adults with ADHD in these countries are unaware of their ADHD, undiagnosed and untreated. Moreover, among those who have received a diagnosis, it is unclear how many are receiving adequate treatment.

### **TREATMENT OF ADULT ADHD**

**Prioritization of ADHD with respect to co-existing conditions:** There are not yet formal protocols about how to treat adult ADHD when there are co-existing conditions – as often occurs -- but some research suggests the following prioritization<sup>10</sup>:

*First*, address and manage substance and alcohol abuse

*Second*, stabilize severe mood disorders

*Third*, stabilize severe anxiety disorders

*Fourth*, treat the ADHD

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

**Medication:** Medication is usually the first line of treatment for both children and adults diagnosed with ADHD. About 70-80% of children respond well to medication. Many adults also respond well, though adults may be able to manage with lower doses. Extended-release versions are generally preferred because of higher patient compliance and lower risk of drug abuse (they can't be as easily injected or snorted).

Most information about treatment of ADHD focuses on children. So far, the U.S. Food and Drug Agency has specifically approved 5 medications for treatment of adult ADHD.

Four of these are stimulants. They inhibit reuptake of dopamine and norepinephrine, so that they remain available to the brain for longer periods. Three of the stimulants are amphetamines and the fourth is methylphenidate; they have similar effects but operate through different neural pathways.

The fifth FDA-approved medication for adults is a highly selective nonstimulant, atomoxetine, that inhibits reuptake of norepinephrine and increases dopamine levels indirectly in the prefrontal cortex.

Side effects: All these medications are contra-indicated for patients with certain cardiac problems or very high blood pressure. The stimulants can cause agitation, anxiety and irritability, and so are not suitable for patients with severe anxiety, agitation or psychosis. Other potential side-effects of both stimulants and nonstimulants include: dry mouth, loss of appetite, nausea and weight loss. In addition, stimulants can cause insomnia.

**Education about ADHD; learning new beliefs and behaviors:** Medication is rarely sufficient to treat all symptoms of adult ADHD, even if it can adequately address imbalances of dopamine and norepinephrine. Adults with ADHD also need education about the disorder and help to address areas of their life that have been significantly impaired.

For optimal benefit, these efforts may need to include close family members. At the workplace, employers may have to be educated. Employers also have to make special accommodations for employees diagnosed with ADHD in countries with laws that provide disability protection for workers.

Patient education may come from many different sources: doctors, advocacy and educational organizations, support groups, etc. Cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy is the most frequently recommended approach to supplement medical treatment. ADHD coaching is another option that is becoming more popular, especially in the United States.

**Aerobic exercise:** Aerobic exercise generates higher levels of dopamine and norepinephrine. Consequently, aerobic exercise can be extremely helpful in reducing

(though usually not eliminating) the need for medication in both children and adults with ADHD.<sup>11</sup>

Yoga and other nonaerobic exercise regimes are usually not mentioned in mainstream ADHD literature, except for occasional recommendations about meditation. This is at least partly due to the small size and number of studies to date about how nonaerobic exercise affects brain function, though this is a growing area of research.

**Diet:** There is much speculation but apparently little clear evidence about the role that diet may play in ADHD. Analysis of dietary impacts is complicated by the frequent existence of co-existing disorders. Anecdotal information and small studies, mostly of children, suggest that sugars and highly refined and processed foods may aggravate some symptoms of ADHD, whereas consuming more protein and Omega 3 oils (in foods or nutritional supplements) may help. It is also helpful to identify any food sensitivities and adapt the diet accordingly.

## **YOGIC PERSPECTIVE**

### **AYURVEDIC ANALYSIS**

**The primary cause of ADHD is excessive Vata. However, ADHD has a tridoshic aspect because the three main characteristics of ADHD correlate with different doshic imbalances:**

**INATTENTION:** Excessive Vata is responsible if difficulty in focusing is due to mental or physical hyperactivity. Excessive Kapha is responsible if difficulty in focusing is due to mental dullness or lethargy that may be improved by physical activity.

**HYPERACTIVITY:** This is a classic symptom of excessive Vata. It can be virtually impossible for the mind and/or body to relax or focus.

**IMPULSIVITY:** Excess Pitta is primarily responsible for difficulties in controlling one's speech and actions. However, excess Vata is an underlying factor if mental or physical hyperactivity is the root cause of these problems.

**Concerns about stimulant medications:** In Ayurvedic terms, the use of psychostimulants to treat ADHD may be counterproductive to some degree.<sup>12</sup> The increased release and delayed reuptake of dopamine and norepinephrine do help manage ADHD symptoms. However, this additional stimulation of an already sensitive Central Nervous System may throw excess Vata energy further out of balance, thus aggravating the underlying cause of ADHD. To help counter these potentially harmful effects, patients should take the lowest dose that provides adequate relief. It is important to

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<sup>11</sup> John J. Ratey with Eric Hagerman, SPARK: THE REVOLUTIONARY NEW SCIENCE OF EXERCISE AND THE BRAIN (Little, Brown and Company 2009), Chapter 6; Russell A. Barkley with Christine M. Benton, TAKING CHARGE OF ADULT ADHD (Guilford Press, 2010), Step 5, Part 28.

<sup>12</sup> Carrie Demers, Treating ADHD...Naturally, <http://www.HimalayaInstitute.org/YI/Article.aspx?id=3415>.

monitor medication dosage over time because yogic remedies may reduce or sometimes even eliminate the need for medication.

### **CHAKRA FOCAL POINT FOR ADHD**

The 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> chakras are the focal points for treating ADHD. The 7<sup>th</sup> chakra relates to neurological disorders; ADHD is linked to deficiency. ADHD is also linked to deficiencies in the 1<sup>st</sup> chakra, including stress, lack of discipline, spaceyness and dissociation from the body. In addition, there may be secondary imbalances in any of the other chakras as well, depending on the specific ADHD symptoms and how they manifest in each individual's life.

### **YOGIC REMEDIES FOR ADULT ADHD**

For purposes of this discussion, I am assuming that the recommended prioritization of treatment protocols noted above in the review of medical perspectives would also apply for yogic purposes. This is an important point because if someone with ADHD also has a severe mood disorder such as depression, it would complicate the choice of yogic remedies. For example, pranayama and asana for depression typically emphasize balancing Kapha, whereas pranayama and asana for ADHD typically emphasize balancing Vata. (Vata is also the main dosha out of balance in anxiety disorders, which are a common co-existing condition of ADHD. Therefore, yogic remedies for ADHD are also likely to help with anxiety disorders, and vice versa.)

The literature about yogic treatment of ADHD focuses on children and adolescents. The same remedies should work for adults but with some potential advantages because adults may tend to be:

- more highly motivated
- able to follow more sophisticated recommendations
- more willing and able to find creative ways to incorporate recommended practices into their daily lives on an ongoing base.

**Yoga philosophy – yamas and niyamas:** The yamas and niyamas, the ethical principles of yoga, offer a useful framework for addressing ADHD. All ten principles have important applications, but the three noted below are likely to be most readily applicable to ADHD adults:

- Ahimsa (1<sup>st</sup> yama) -- nonviolence, nonharming: Applying ahimsa to oneself helps to clarify why it is important to learn more about ADHD and how to change beliefs and behaviors that impair functioning in key areas of one's life.
- Svadhyaya (4<sup>th</sup> niyama) – self-study: Understanding how ADHD is affecting one's life, and seeing harmful patterns, is a necessary first step to constructive change.
- Tapas (3<sup>rd</sup> niyama) – self-discipline: This is a great challenge for people with ADHD, and yet it is crucial for effectively achieving desired change.



**Pranayama:** Pranayama offers a simple, powerful and always available way to calm the nervous system and promote better mental, emotional and physical balance. The following pranayamas are particularly helpful for ADHD:

-- Longer, fuller exhales: This can be done by anyone, anywhere, at any time, and it requires no special experience with yoga. At its simplest, the person can simply concentrate on long sighs to release tension (h-a-a-a-h). This will naturally release excess carbon dioxide and allow for fuller oxygenation during inhales. If there is interest, the client can learn more disciplined practices, such as gradually increasing the comparative length of exhales vs. inhales.

-- Ujjayi breath: This is an extremely useful breath for balancing the entire nervous system and improving the ability to focus.

-- Chandra bhedna (inhaling through the left nostril and exhaling through the right nostril): This is a very calming breath that will appeal to more advanced practitioners.

-- Laughter yoga: Laughter is essentially an extended pranayama practice consisting of exercises that mimic the breathing and sound patterns of laughter. As long as participants follow the exercises, their brains will think that they are genuinely laughing and release the endorphins that accompany laughter. This is an easy, fun way to induce participants to breathe more fully and release stress and feel more joy. It also offers a chance to engage comfortably in a group environment, something that can be challenging for ADHD adults.

**Asana:** Doing any asana practice mindfully can help manage ADHD through better grounding, focus and internal awareness. Holding poses can also increase focus and stability. Props should be used as needed, especially for people who are new to yoga or have physical limitations.

Slow, gentle vinyasa while moving mindfully with the breath is helpful for calming excessive Vata. It generates *triputi*, the union of body, breath and mind. Practicing yoga mudra to a count of 4 or 8 is also helpful for calming Vata dosha.<sup>13</sup>

Yoga mudra (top of head on floor) will help to balance the 7<sup>th</sup> chakra. So will headstand, for experienced yoga practitioners; for those with some experience but who are not yet ready for full headstand, it may be beneficial to do supported headstand at the wall, using blocks and blankets.

In addition, the following categories of asana are beneficial for ADHD. Standing, balancing and forward bending poses are particularly important because they help to balance muladhara chakra and correct Vata imbalances. *Examples within each category are listed from simpler to more challenging, so that there will be appropriate choices for any level of experience with yoga, including those with no prior experience.*

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<sup>13</sup> Karen Claffey & Guest Teachers, YOGA THERAPIST TRAINING MANUAL (copyright 2002-2010, Section 2, p. 36), Karen Claffey & Heaven On Earth Yoga Institute, www.heavenstudio.com.

- Standing poses for grounding and stability, with ujjayi breath (e.g., tadasana, triangle, warrior 1 and 2)
- Balancing poses for focus, with ujjayi breath (e.g., tree, eagle, side plank, warrior 3)
- Twists for releasing tension and toxins, with ujjayi and/or extended exhales: (e.g., reclining and seated twists (ranging from simple versions to more challenging variations), triangle, revolved triangle, revolved half-moon)
- Forward bends for calming, with ujjayi and/or extended exhales (e.g., standing forward fold, seated forward folds (cobbler, stacked firelogs, paschimotanasana, upavishtakonasana, janusirsasana), child's pose (with forehead on floor or other support to balance 6<sup>th</sup> chakra)
- Yoga mudra with crown of head on the floor (hare or rabbit pose); headstand to balance 7<sup>th</sup> chakra
- Restorative yoga: Restorative poses by definition are calming, even when they support deep opening. For beginners, it would be best to introduce restorative poses that require few props or special set-up, such as legs-up-the-wall.
- Yin yoga: For experienced practitioners, yin yoga could be a good option because it tends to focus on holding calming poses, such as forward bends, for an extended time, while promoting deepening internal awareness and connection with the breath
- Savasana: Final relaxation is very important for allowing the body and mind to deeply rest, relax and integrate the beneficial effects of practice.

**Mula bhandha** is another practice that could be helpful to ADHD adults. Depending on the level of experience and interest, a client could do anything from just gently lifting the pelvic floor during long exhales, to strongly engaging Mula Bhandha during pranayama and asana practice. In any case, being able to access the root lock would be another way to increase grounding and strengthen the 1<sup>st</sup> chakra.

**Aerobic exercise w/ ujjayi breath**: Incorporating ujjayi breath into aerobic exercise will help adults with ADHD experience greater benefits from the exercise itself, by increasing their endurance and stamina. It will also contribute to overall efforts to balance Vata and the nervous system through pranayama.

**Meditation**: Meditation is the yogic practice most frequently studied and recommended for improving brain function and addressing anxiety and other disorders linked to Vata imbalance.

People with ADHD who experience severe hyperactive/impulsive symptoms may find it too challenging to practice classic seated meditation initially.<sup>14</sup> In such cases, it may be best to begin by approaching their pranayama and asana practices from a mindful, meditative perspective. As this becomes easier, they could next try walking meditation and then gradually experiment with seated meditation. They could begin with sitting for just five minutes a few times a week, and then gradually increase the length and

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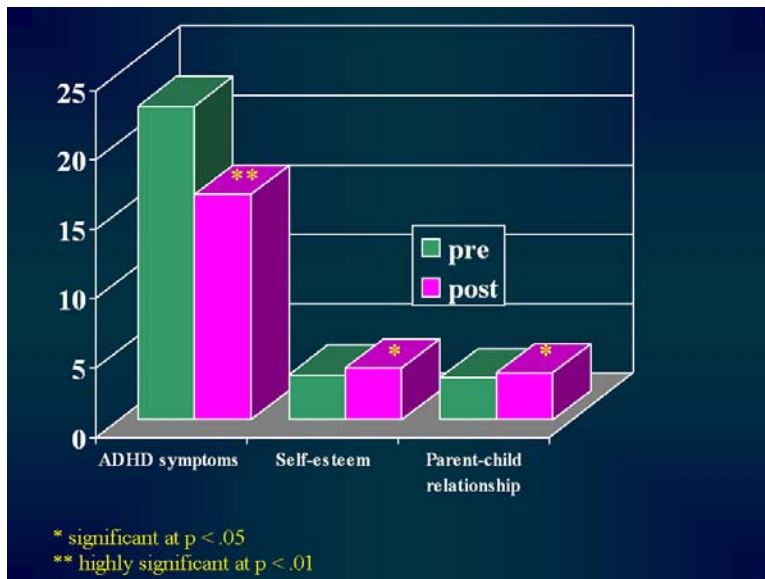
<sup>14</sup> Jim Spira, Meditation and ADHD, MEDITATION IN PSYCHOTHERAPY FORUM ARCHIVE, <http://www.behavior.net/forums/meditation/1998/msg288> (1/3/02).

frequency of seated meditation over time.

For ADHD adults with inattention symptoms, the following has been recommended:

“In meditation position (floor or chair) focus on one thing you are looking at for three slow, deep, relaxed (and effortless) breaths. Then focus on one thing you hear for three such breaths. Then focus on the feeling of the breath in your nose for three breaths. Do this for about ten cycles. (about 15 minutes) twice a day. Then, when you are trying to pay attention during the day, apply the same principle, of staying connected with what you see, hear and feel, rather than drifting off in your mind.”<sup>15</sup>

Loving kindness meditation (metta) may be particularly helpful for ADHD adults who suffer from low self-esteem and feelings of being misunderstood or not fitting in. In loving kindness, the practitioner repeats phrases of well-wishing. These wishes are often directed in ever-widening circles, beginning with the practitioner and extending outward to family, friends, colleagues, close circles, etc., until they include all beings. However, this approach can be adapted in any way that suits the practitioner. It can be challenging to begin metta practice when one does NOT feel well, or well-loved. However, it is a very healing meditation that can have powerful long-term emotional benefits.



*This graph shows the results of a study in Australia of 26 children with ADHD who were taught and practiced meditation for 6 weeks.<sup>16</sup> As shown in this graph, there were highly significant reductions in ADHD symptoms, and significant improvements in the childrens’ self-esteem and relationship with their parents. These results were the same for medicated and unmedicated children. Of the children taking stimulant medication, 40% were able to reduce their dosage of medication, 16%*

*stopped taking medication, and 45% had no change in medication use. There was no information about whether these changes continued beyond the period of the study.*

**Yoga nidra:** The deep calm and relaxation induced by yoga nidra, also called “yogic sleep,” could be highly beneficial for ADHD adults. Nowadays, is it sometimes possible to find classes and workshops on yoga nidra. These can be supplemented with guided

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Effects of Sahaja Yoga Meditation on ADHD, <http://www.meditationresearch.co.uk/6.html>.

yoga nidra recordings. Yoga nidra that balances the chakras could be particularly helpful. However, the most important thing is for each individual to find one or two recordings that works best for him or her.

**Mudra:** Pran mudra is a grounding mudra that is very appropriate to help balance Vata dosha and strengthen the 1<sup>st</sup> chakra of ADHD adults.<sup>17</sup> On the physical level, it reduces nervousness, releases toxins and increases vitality. On the mental/emotional level, it gives courage to start something new and the confidence to see it through to completion. It can be incorporated into pranayama, seated meditation, or employed on its own as needed.

To perform Pran mudra, place together the tip of the thumb with the tips of the pinky and ring fingers of each hand, keeping the middle and ring fingers comfortably extended. Alternately, place the tip of the thumb on the nails of the pinky and ring fingers, which is supposed to help balance the two hemispheres of the brain.

**Balancing the chakras:**



As noted above, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> chakras are the main focal points for treating ADHD. In addition, there may be secondary imbalances in any of the other chakras, depending on specific ADHD symptoms and how they manifest in each individual’s life.

The following chart provides information about all the chakras that could be helpful to an ADHD adult.

CHAKRA	ISSUE	COLOR	VOWEL SOUND	SEED SOUND	BODY SITE
1 <sup>st</sup> (Muladhara)	Survival, security, grounding	Red	O (go)	Lam	Base of spine
2 <sup>nd</sup> (Swadhisthana)	Sexuality, pleasure	Orange	AH (father)	Vam	Sacral region
3 <sup>rd</sup> (Manipura)	Power	Yellow	OO (you)	Ram	Navel/solar plexus
4 <sup>th</sup> (Anahata)	Love, compassion	Green	AY (play)	Yam	Heart
5 <sup>th</sup> (Vishuddha)	Communication	Blue	EE (see)	Ham	Throat

<sup>17</sup> Gertrud Hirsch, MUDRAS: YOGA IN YOUR HANDS (2000, p. 70)

6 <sup>th</sup> (Ajna)	Intuition, equanimity	Indigo/Purple	MMM, NN	Om	Forehead, Third Eye
7 <sup>th</sup> (Sahasrara)	Union, wholeness	Purple/White light	NGNGNG (sing)	[silence]	Crown of the head

The recommended asanas for standing, balancing and forward bending poses, plus use of Pran mudra, will especially support muladhara chakra. Yoga mudra with crown of head on the floor and headstand specifically help to balance Sahasrara chakra. More generally, the yogic remedies discussed above can contribute to balancing all seven chakras, any of which could be affected, depending on the specific issues concern a particular ADHD adult. Any asana practice can be adapted to fit any particular chakra imbalance. For example, someone with 4<sup>th</sup> chakra issues could perform forward bends with awareness of keeping the heart center open.

For clients with sufficient motivation and interest, it would be beneficial to practice chanting, visualization and even movement (e.g., chakra trance dance) specifically focused on balancing the chakras. If time is limited, focus should be on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> chakras. If time permits, it would be useful to go through the entire series. This needn't take long, and it can be a very pleasurable experience for those who enjoy sound, imagery and/or free-style movement centered on the corresponding part of the body.

Additional ways to balance the chakras are to look at the chakra symbols, to incorporate chakras into meditation and yoga nidra, and to use the relevant chakra colors in clothing, jewelry, décor, choice of foods, etc.

**Massage:** Massage, especially with Ayurvedic massage oils, such as warm sesame oil, can help to re-balance Vata energies, which tend to be dry and airy. Receiving a massage from someone else is especially nourishing, but self-massage can also be very supportive. One simple practice for ADHD adults would be to massage the feet before sleep and cover them with socks to protect the bed sheets from oil stains.

**Diet and nutrition:** In general, ADHD adults should adopt a Vata-balancing diet, as described below:<sup>18</sup>

Prefer:

- Cooked, warm, soupy, light foods
- Plenty of healthy oils
- Natural and healthy sweet, sour, and salty tastes and flavorful sauces
- Spices that help digestion, such as basil, oregano, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, cumin, coriander and dill
- Protein-rich diet of animal products that do not take the animal's life, light grains, easily digested nuts and sesame seeds
- Best fresh fruits and juices: tomato, pomegranate, fresh-squeezed orange and grapefruit, apricot, peach, strawberry, raspberry

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<sup>18</sup> Claffey, op. cit., Section 2, p. 34.

-- Lot of fresh veggies and fresh vegetable juices, including dark leafy greens and root vegetables

Avoid:

- Caffeine, white sugar, soda pop
- Excessive use of beans (except tofu) and heavy grains (unless prepared with ghee and spices)
- Dry foods taken alone
- Taking food and drinks colder than room temperature
- Red meat

Adults with moderate or severe ADHD should consult an Ayurvedic doctor so that diet and nutrition, including special herbs and tonics, can be tailored to his or her specific needs. This could be important both because of the potential for underlying tridoshic imbalances and the high potential for co-existing conditions.

**Establishing regular routines:** Adults with ADHD have difficulty operating without structure. Lack of structure exacerbates problems with time management, organization, setting priorities, etc. Therefore, it can be very helpful for them to establish and adhere as much as possible to regular daily routines. This provides a “container” for their creative and expansive energies.<sup>19</sup>

**A psycho-spiritual lens for change:**<sup>20</sup> An adult interested in yoga therapy for ADHD is probably seeking big change, and yoga therapy offers many potential options for growth. The biggest resource the client contributes is his or her own self.

Adults with ADHD are usually creative and resourceful, both by nature and necessity. One creative way to open the path to change is to see themselves as “living at the source” of their own wisdom and intuition, rather than “at the mercy of” their ADHD.

Few would choose to undergo the challenges presented by ADHD, but seeing those challenges as opportunities for growth and change can shift one’s whole perspective. Some principles that will support moving in this direction include:

1. Being in the present by bringing a mindful attitude to life.
2. Awakening intuition by staying in touch with our bodies, not just our busy minds.
3. Accepting our reality and focusing on what feels positive and right, rather than what is “wrong.”
4. Letting go of the desire to be in control so that we can flow with the river of life, rather than battling our way upstream.
5. Forgiveness for ourselves and others, so that we can free up more energy to evolve along our path of change.

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<sup>19</sup> Ayurveda, Hyperactivity and Attention Deficit Disorder, <http://www.AyurvedaCollege.com>.

<sup>20</sup> Stephane Bensoussan, PSYCHOSPIRITUAL THERAPY (2006), [www.PsySante.com](http://www.PsySante.com).