

Succeeding in College with ADHD

HEADING OFF TO COLLEGE AND WONDERING HOW YOU’LL COPE with your ADHD symptoms? First, know that you are not alone. Plenty of people who have ADHD or its symptoms have succeeded in college. That includes learning how to deal with issues of time management, emotional and social well-being, focusing in class, doing homework, and taking tests. With some planning around academics, mental health, and relationships, you can not only survive but thrive in college.

Academics

You probably already know that symptoms of ADHD such as distractibility, disorganization, and poor time management can make class time, homework, and test taking challenging, but you’ll find that many of the tools you used in high school will be helpful in college as well.

- Use a planner or digital calendar and set reminders to keep track of assignments, quizzes and tests, your schedule, and any other important events or dates.
- Plan backward to figure out the steps you’ll need to take to finish long-term assignments on time and prepare for exams.
- Plan to study during the times when your stimulant medication is most effective.
- Divide the time you spend completing assignments, reading textbooks, and studying into chunks. For example, plan to study for 30 minutes at a time. Then take a 5- or 10-minute break before the next half-hour of studying, instead of trying to go for hours without a break.
- Think about study tools that have worked for you in the past. Flash-



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cards are one example of a useful study tool.

- When it comes time to choose a major, pick one that truly interests you. This will help increase your motivation to do your work.

Meet with professors and teaching assistants during their office hours. If you can’t make those times because of your schedule, ask if they would

be willing to meet at a different time. Most will be understanding. Take advantage of peer tutors or focus groups, if available, for extra support and instruction.

IEP and 504 Plans do not carry over into college, so you will have to look into getting any special accommodations in college. You might want to contact the college’s disabil-

ity service office to see if things like extended test taking time, mid-exam breaks, or use of a private exam room so you're not distracted are available. They will need written proof of your ADHD diagnosis and information on how it affects you as a student. They will also want to meet with you to discuss any accommodations you might need. You can also talk directly to your professors and let them know what you need to be successful in their classes.

Mental health care

It's important you take care of your mental health and well-being. A good first step is to establish a routine that reinforces healthy behaviors, while limiting drinking and avoiding substance use. A good routine should include:

- A regular sleep-wake schedule that allows you to get close to eight hours of sleep each night
- Proper use of ADHD and other mental health medication
- Healthy food choices and regular physical exercise

If you take the time now to create a healthy routine that you can maintain, you'll be more likely to meet your short- and long-term goals. You'll also feel less overwhelmed by college and be more likely to succeed. But remember, lots of students starting out struggle with feelings of anxiety or depression. Never hesitate to seek professional help from your college's campus counseling or health center. Most universities offer free therapy sessions and other resources, including group or individual cognitive behavioral therapy and ADHD coaching.

Medication

Just like when you were in high school, being careful about when you take your medication will be part of your path to success. If you're using a stimulant medication, make sure you



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and your doctor or medication provider find the treatment regimen that is most effective in reducing ADHD symptoms and allows you to function well with few or no side effects.

ADHD medication is frequently misused and abused on college campuses. Some students who need to get a lot of work done want the perceived benefits of the stimulant medications. Friends, acquaintances, or even strangers might ask if you can give or sell them your medication. Don't do either. Selling or sharing prescription medication is illegal. Besides, you need it for yourself to succeed in college!

Look for a safe place to store your ADHD medication and keep track of it. A small lockbox may be a great solution for storing stimulants. If you are unable to use a lockbox, find another secure location and don't share information about it with friends or acquaintances.

Social success

Starting out in a new place with new people is exciting, but students with ADHD sometimes have a harder time than others creating and maintaining satisfying friendships. Think about what has worked for you in the past:

- Be open to opportunities to meet people and make new friends, whether in class, in your dorm, or elsewhere.
- When you meet other incoming students during orientation, remember that it's all new to them, too. Be friendly and a good listener.
- Participate in clubs and extracurricular activities that interest you and allow you to meet people who share those interests.
- Use your high school friends and your family as support throughout college. They'll be able to help and encourage you during the ups as well as the downs. 🌱



For further information, please contact National Resource Center on ADHD: A Program of CHADD

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