FREE GUIDE

Your first week after an ADHD diagnosis

A guide for adults: what it means, what to ask, and how to start.



Start with one section a day.

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A note from Andrea



Dear reader,

If you're holding this guide, you've probably just been told you have ADHD, or you're waiting to find out. Whatever you're feeling right now makes sense, and you're in good company.

I was 45 when I was diagnosed. Suddenly, a lot of my life made sense. Things I had always put down to my personality had an explanation, and that explanation gave me somewhere to start.

That's what I hope this guide gives you. Understanding how your brain works changes the question you ask yourself. It becomes "What would help me?", and that question opens a lot of doors.

I'm also raising a son with ADHD, so I know this as an adult and as a parent. So many people are exactly where you are right now, with the same questions and a whole mix of feelings. You're one of many, and there's a lot that helps.

I wrote this guide because I wish someone had handed me something like it: clear information, practical things to try, and the reassurance that you can take this one step at a time.

Read it a page at a time, in any order. Come back to it whenever you're ready.

You've already done the hardest part, which is finding out.

Cheering you on,

Andrea

How to use this guide

This guide is for the first week or so after an ADHD diagnosis. It's in ten short sections:

1. How you might be feeling
2. What ADHD is, and what it means for you
3. The seven skills behind getting things done
4. What often comes alongside ADHD
5. Getting ready for your next appointment
6. Your first week, day by day
7. Three changes to try first
8. Telling people: your choice
9. Changing the story you tell yourself
10. Your "How I work best" page

At the end you'll find a list of ADHD words explained, where to go next, and the sources for every fact in this guide.

Read it in any order. If you only have ten minutes, read section 6, "Your first week, day by day", and start there.

This guide is general information from a coach. It works alongside advice from your doctor. For anything about your health or treatment, talk to the specialist who diagnosed you.

1 How you might be feeling

People feel all kinds of things after a diagnosis, often several at once, and often different things on different days.

Relief.

There's a reason, and it has a name.

Grief.

For the years you spent struggling without knowing why. For the school reports that said "could try harder". For the version of your life you imagine might have been easier.

Anger.
At teachers, doctors, or family who didn't notice. At yourself, for not knowing sooner.

Doubt.
"Maybe everyone feels like this." "Maybe I exaggerated in the assessment." "Maybe I'm just making excuses."

Going back over your life.
Jobs, friendships, arguments, and decisions start to look different.

Very little, for now.
Some people feel very little at first. That's fine too.

Every way of feeling is a fair way to feel, and you can take as long as you need.

The doubt is normal

Many adults doubt their diagnosis in the first few weeks. Part of the reason is that you've spent years managing, compensating, and covering, so your difficulties don't always look like the ones you've read about. If you have doubts, write them down and take them to your next appointment. Asking questions about your own diagnosis is sensible, not ungrateful.

Try this: three things that make sense now

Take a few minutes and write down three things from your past that make more sense now. For example:

- "Why I could write a report at 2 am but not start it at 2 pm."
- "Why I always felt exhausted after a normal workday."
- "Why I lost my keys every single week."

The aim is to see your past more accurately, and more kindly.

2 What ADHD is, and what it means for you

What the diagnosis means

ADHD stands for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The name is a little misleading. People with ADHD can pay attention, sometimes intensely. What ADHD affects is how the brain **directs**

and manages attention, energy, and actions.

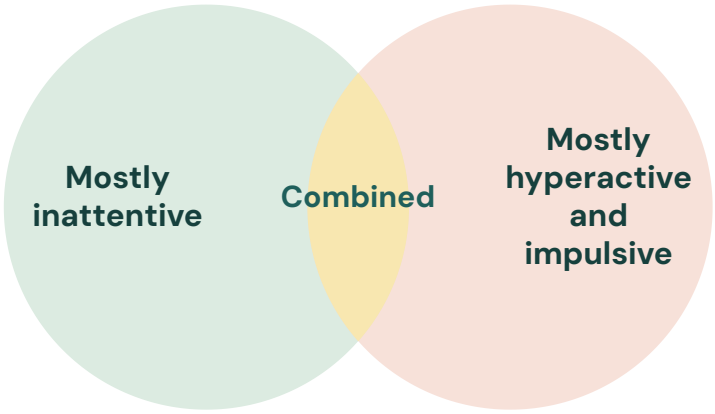
A specialist diagnoses ADHD when these difficulties:

- have been there since childhood, even if nobody noticed at the time
- show up in more than one part of life, for example at work and at home
- happen often enough to get in the way of everyday life

So a diagnosis tells you something specific: the things you've found hard for a long time have a recognised explanation, and there are well-known ways to make them easier.

The three presentations

Doctors describe ADHD in three ways, depending on which signs are strongest:



Presentation	What it can look like in adults
Mostly inattentive	Drifting off in meetings, losing track of tasks, forgetting appointments, losing things, finding it hard to start or finish
Mostly hyperactive-impulsive	Feeling restless, talking a lot, interrupting, making quick decisions, finding it hard to wait
Combined	A mix of both. This is the most common

In adults, hyperactivity often looks like an inner restlessness: a mind that keeps going, or a need to always be doing something. Your report should say which presentation you have. If it doesn't, ask.

How it might explain your past

Many people find that a diagnosis helps them look back at their life with more understanding. For example:

- **Starting tasks.** You may have known exactly what to do and still found it very hard to begin, unless there was a deadline, an emergency, or something that really interested you. This is

one of the most common experiences with ADHD.

- **Time.** You may often have been late, even when you tried hard to be on time, or found that a task took much longer than you expected. ADHD can make it harder to feel time passing and to estimate how long things take.
- **Remembering.** You may have forgotten appointments, messages, or what someone asked you to do, even when it mattered to you. ADHD affects working memory, the brain's way of holding information while you use it.
- **Feelings.** You may have reacted strongly to criticism or frustration, and then found it hard to calm down. Many adults with ADHD find their emotions come on quickly and strongly.
- **Energy.** You may have finished a normal day completely exhausted. Managing all of this without knowing why takes a lot of effort.

You may recognise some of these, all of them, or very few. ADHD looks different in every person.

Questions people often ask

? "Why wasn't it noticed sooner?"

There are several common reasons. The inattentive kind of ADHD is less visible than the hyperactive kind, so it's often missed, especially in girls and women. Many people do well at school, where the day is structured, and only struggle later, when work, family, and running a home ask more of them. Many adults also develop ways of coping that hide their difficulties, often at a high cost in energy. Big life changes, like a new job, a baby, or moving to a new country, can make ADHD much more noticeable.

? "What causes it?"

ADHD comes from differences in how the brain develops. The exact cause is still being researched, and genes play an important part, and ADHD often runs in families. Your effort has always been real.

? "Does it run in my family?"

It often does. After a diagnosis, many people start to recognise ADHD traits in a parent, a sibling, or their own children. If you have children, it's worth knowing the signs. If a child of yours has already been diagnosed, it's common for a parent to be diagnosed afterwards.

? "Will it go away?"

ADHD usually continues into adulthood, though the way it shows up can change over time. What changes most is how much it gets in your way. With understanding, the right support, and treatment if you and your doctor decide it's right for you, daily life can become much easier.

? "Will I need medication?"

That's a decision for you and your doctor. Support for adults with ADHD can include medication, talking therapies, coaching, and practical changes at work and at home. Many people use a combination. Your doctor can explain the options and what would suit you.

? "Does it change who I am?"

You're the same person you were before the diagnosis. The difference is that you now have a better explanation for some of what you've experienced, and a clearer idea of what might help.

? "Can I have other conditions too?"

Yes. ADHD often comes with other conditions, such as anxiety, low mood, sleep problems, or dyslexia. Section 4 explains what to look out for and who to see.

Things worth knowing early

Feeling worse before you feel better is common.
Once you know about ADHD, you may notice it everywhere for a while. That usually settles as you find what helps.

Your past achievements count.
Everything you've done so far, you did without knowing about your ADHD and without the support that might have helped.

Hormones and life stages can make a difference.
Some women notice their ADHD changes with their menstrual cycle, pregnancy, or perimenopause. If you notice this, mention it to your doctor.

Sleep, food, and movement matter more than you might expect.
They affect focus, mood, and energy for everyone, and many people with ADHD find them harder to keep steady.

You can tell people in your own time.
Take time to understand your diagnosis before you decide who to tell. Section 8 can help when you're ready.

Myths and what's true

What people say	What's true
"It's a lack of effort."	Many people with ADHD work harder than anyone around them to get the same result.
"Everyone's a bit ADHD."	Everyone loses focus sometimes. ADHD means the difficulties are persistent, show up in more than one area of life, and get in the way.
"You can't have it if you did well at school."	Many people with ADHD do well, especially when they're interested or under pressure. It often shows up later, when life gets more complicated.
"Adults grow out of it."	Symptoms can change with age, but for many people ADHD continues into adulthood.
"It's an excuse."	A diagnosis is an explanation. It tells you what kind of support will help.

There are strengths too

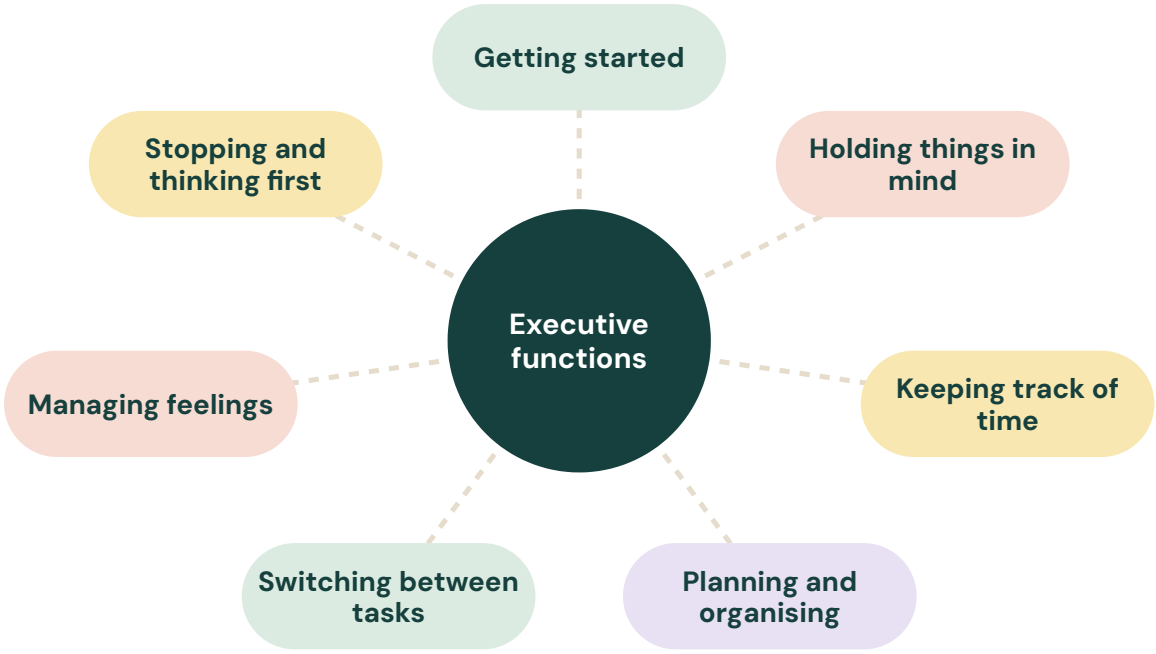
Many people with ADHD are creative, curious, quick to see connections, good in a crisis, and able to focus deeply on things that interest them. ADHD also brings real difficulties, and both are true. Knowing your strengths is as useful as knowing what's hard, and it goes on your "How I work best" page.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

ADHD symptoms usually start in childhood and often continue into adulthood. ADHD often runs in families, and it is thought to be recognised less often in women, who more commonly have inattentive symptoms. People with ADHD are more likely to also have anxiety, depression, or a learning difficulty such as dyslexia. Sources: NHS, ADHD in adults; NIMH, ADHD.

3 The seven skills behind getting things done

Executive functions are the skills your brain uses to manage everything else. With ADHD, some of these work differently. Knowing which ones are hardest for you is one of the most useful things you can learn.



Tick the ones that sound most like you.

Skill	When it's hard, it can look like…	What often helps
☐ **Getting started**	Knowing exactly what to do and still not starting. Waiting for a deadline to create enough pressure.	Make the first step tiny and physical. Start with someone else in the room.
☐ **Holding things in mind** (working memory)	Walking into a room and forgetting why. Losing the thread of a conversation. Forgetting what someone asked you to do.	Write it down the moment you think of it, in one place.
☐ **Keeping track of time**	Being late, even when you tried hard not to be. Ten minutes feeling like two. Deadlines next week feeling unreal.	Clocks you can see, timers, alarms with labels.
☐ **Planning and organising**	Not knowing where to start with a big task. Piles of paper. Too many things on the go.	Break big tasks into steps you can see. One list for everything.
☐ **Switching between tasks**	Finding it hard to stop something you're absorbed in. Feeling thrown by changes of plan.	A warning before switching. A short break between tasks.
☐ **Managing feelings**	Big reactions to everyday moments. Criticism hurting more than it seems to hurt others. Frustration that comes fast and strong.	Noticing the early signs. A pause before replying. Time away, then try again.

Skill	When it's hard, it can look like…	What often helps
☐ **Stopping and thinking first** (impulse control)	Saying things before thinking. Impulse buying. Interrupting.	Building in a pause: wait a day before buying, write the reply but don't send it yet.

Start small. Pick the one or two that cause the most trouble. That's where the three changes in section 7 come in.

What really drives focus

Many people with ADHD notice they can focus for hours on something that interests them, but can't make themselves start something boring, even when it matters. Interest, novelty, challenge, and urgency all help an ADHD brain get going. Importance alone often doesn't.

Once you know this, you can use it: make a dull task more interesting (music, a new place, a timer race), add a bit of urgency (a deadline with someone else), or do it alongside someone.

4 What often comes alongside ADHD

ADHD often comes with other conditions or difficulties. It's worth knowing what to look out for, so you can ask about them. A doctor or psychologist is the right person to assess these. **Who to see:**

If you notice…	Who to talk to
Low mood that lasts more than two weeks, or feels heavy	Your doctor, a psychiatrist, or a psychologist
Anxiety or worry that gets in the way of daily life	Your doctor or a psychologist
Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up, most nights	Your doctor, who may refer you to a sleep specialist
Worries about eating, weight, or your relationship with food	Your doctor, who can refer you to someone good
Difficulty with reading, spelling, or numbers	An educational psychologist
Finding social situations very hard, or strong sensory sensitivities	Ask the specialist who diagnosed you whether an autism assessment would be useful

If you notice…	Who to talk to
Drinking, gambling, spending, or other habits that feel out of control	Your doctor, or a specialist service

If you're ever in danger, or thinking about harming yourself, call 999 or go to your nearest emergency department.

5 Getting ready for your next appointment

Appointments go quickly, and it's easy to forget what you meant to ask. Fill in this section before you go, and take it with you.

Questions about the diagnosis

1. What did the assessment show? Which presentation do I have?
2. Can I have a copy of the written report?
3. Did you look at anything else that could explain how I feel, or that often comes alongside ADHD?

Questions about options

4. What are my options for treatment and support, and which would you suggest for me, and why?
5. Are there talking therapies or programmes for adults with ADHD that you'd recommend?
6. Could coaching help alongside treatment?

Questions if medication is one of the options

7. What should I expect, and how long before we know if it's working?
8. What should I tell you about at the next appointment?
9. Who do I contact if I have questions between appointments?

Practical questions for the UAE

10. What does my insurance cover for follow-up appointments?
11. If I'm prescribed medicine and I travel, what paperwork do I need? (Ask your doctor or pharmacist, as the rules for some medicines are strict.)
12. Can you write a letter for my employer or university, if I decide I want one?

My own questions

What to take with you

☐ This page, with your questions

☐ A list of any medicines and supplements you take

☐ Notes on how things have been since your last appointment (see below)

☐ Someone you trust, if you'd like company or a second pair of ears

My notes since the last appointment

A few real examples are more useful to a doctor than general descriptions.

Date	What happened	How it affected me

Keep your report somewhere safe, and keep a digital copy. You may need it for work, study, insurance, or travel.

6 Your first week, day by day

Take what helps, on whichever days suit you. It's a gentle plan for a week that might feel like a lot.



Day	What to do	Time it takes
Day 1	Read sections 1 and 2 of this guide, and let the news sink in.	15 minutes
Day 2	Write your "three things that make sense now" (section 1).	10 minutes
Day 3	Set up one place for everything you need to remember (change 1).	10 minutes
Day 4	Make time visible: a clock you can see, and labelled alarms (change 2).	10 minutes
Day 5	Pick one task you've been putting off and do the first two minutes (change 3).	2 minutes
Day 6	If you want to, tell one person you trust (section 8).	As long as you need
Day 7	Fill in your "How I work best" page (section 10). Look back at the week.	20 minutes

At the end of the week, ask yourself:

- What helped, even a little?

- What felt harder?

- What do I want to keep doing next week?

If you missed days, that's useful information about how you work.

7 Three changes to try first

Start with three changes. Each takes about ten minutes to set up.

1. **Get it out of your head**
2. **Make time visible**
3. **Start with the first two minutes**

Change 1: Get it out of your head

> **Why:** Working memory is the brain's whiteboard, the place where you hold things while you use them. With ADHD, things get wiped off it quickly. That's why you walk into a room and forget why, or remember the bill only at midnight.

Try this: Choose one place for everything you need to remember. One notes app, or one notebook that lives in your bag. The moment you think of something, write it there.

Make it work:

- Put the app on your phone's home screen, or keep a pen clipped to the notebook. Aim to write things down in under ten seconds.
- Check it at the same time every day, for example with your morning coffee.
- Once a week, cross out what's done and move what's left to a fresh page.

If you need to adjust it: if you forget to check it, attach checking it to something you already do every day. If you have too many lists, choose the one you actually open and move everything there.

Change 2: Make time visible

> **Why:** Many people with ADHD find it hard to feel time passing. There's "now", and there's "not now". This is why ten minutes can feel like two, and a deadline next week can feel like it doesn't exist yet.

Try this: Put a clock where you can see it while you work. Use a timer for tasks. Label your alarms with what they're for: "Leave for school pick-up" rather than "Alarm 3".

Make it work:

- Set two alarms for anything important: one to start getting ready, and one to leave.

- Before you start a task, guess how long it will take. Time it. Over a few weeks, you'll learn your real times.
- Put deadlines in your calendar with a reminder a few days before, as well as on the day.

If you need to adjust it: if you ignore alarms, change the sound or the wording so they get your attention again. Fresh alarms get noticed.

Change 3: Start with the first two minutes

> **Why:** With ADHD, starting is often the hardest part. A task can feel like a wall, even when you know exactly what to do.

Try this: Pick one task you've been putting off. Decide the very first physical step ("open the email", "find the form") and do only that, for two minutes. If you want to keep going, keep going. If not, you've still started.

Make it work:

- Write the first step on a sticky note and put it where you'll see it.
- Try working alongside someone else, in the room or on a video call. This is called body doubling, and it helps a lot of people get started.
- Reward yourself straight after each step.

If you need to adjust it: make the first step even smaller. "Write the report" is too big. "Open the document and type the title" is about right.

If a change needs adjusting

Change one thing about it and try again for a few days. If it still feels wrong, let it go. That tells you something useful about how you work, and it goes on your "How I work best" page.

Remember the basics

Sleep, food, and movement affect every one of the seven skills. Sleep problems are common with ADHD, and many people forget to eat when they're focused. If one of these is clearly a problem, it's worth starting there. The "Sleep, food, and movement" page on andreaantal.com has practical ideas.

8 Telling people: your choice

Who you tell, when, and how much is your choice. Some people tell everyone in the first week. Some tell one person. Some wait months, and some keep it private with certain people. All of these are fine.

Before you tell anyone, think about

- **Why you want to tell them.** For support? So they understand you better? To ask for something specific?
- **What you'd like from them.** Listening? Practical help? Nothing, just for them to know?
- **When.** A calm moment, when you both have time.

A partner

> "I've been diagnosed with ADHD. It explains some of the things I've found hard, like [one example]. It might explain some of the things that frustrate you too. I'm still working out what helps. One thing that would help me right now is [one request]."

Partners can react with relief, worry, or "So that's why!" Some will need time. If ADHD has been part of tension between you, it can help to read about it together. The "At home and with the people you love" section on andreaantal.com is a good place to start.

Family who may be unsure

> "I know ADHD might be new to you. It's a real difference in how the brain works, and the assessment was done by a specialist. You can take your time understanding it. I'm telling you because it matters to me."

Some family members may say "everyone's a bit ADHD", "you were fine as a child", or that it's an excuse. In some families and cultures, mental health and diagnoses are rarely talked about. People can come round in their own time. If you'd like something to share, the ADHD explained page on andreaantal.com has the facts, with sources.

A friend

> "I found out I have ADHD. It's why I sometimes disappear for weeks and then get back in touch. I always care, even when I go silent."

Work

Telling your employer is your choice, and you can take your time deciding. Some people keep it private at work and simply ask for what helps. Some tell a trusted manager. Some tell HR. Think about your workplace, your manager, and what you'd want to ask for.

Things you can ask for, with or without mentioning ADHD:

- Instructions and decisions in writing, as well as in meetings
- Big projects broken into checkpoints with dates
- A quieter place to work, or noise-cancelling headphones
- Regular short check-ins with your manager
- Notice before priorities change

The "At work" section on andreaantal.com covers what to ask for and how to say it.

9 Changing the story you tell yourself

Many adults with ADHD have spent years hearing, and then telling themselves, the same things. Those stories take time to shift, and you can start to notice them and replace them with something more accurate.

The old story	A more accurate version
"I'm careless."	"My brain finds details hard to hold on to. Checklists help me."
"I never finish anything."	"I'm great at starting. Finishing needs a different kind of support."
"I'm always late."	"I find it hard to feel time passing. Alarms and buffers help."
"I'm too sensitive."	"Criticism hits me hard. I can give myself time before I respond."
"I should be able to do this by now."	"I've been doing this without the right tools. Now I can find them."

Try this: next time you hear yourself say one of the old stories, stop and ask: "What got in the way?" Write the answer down. That's useful information, and it often points straight to what would help.

Write your own:

My old story	A more accurate version

10 Your "How I work best" page

This is one page about you: what helps you, what gets in your way, and what to do when things go wrong. Keep it for yourself, or share it with a partner, manager, or teacher. You decide.

How to fill it in

- Use what you've learned this week: the skills you ticked in section 3, and what helped in section 6.
- Write three lines in each box. Short and specific works best.
- Use your own words. "I need quiet" is better than a word you've read somewhere.
- Think of a recent day that went well, and a day that didn't. What was different?
- It's a first draft. Change it as you learn more about how you work.

For example

- **What helps me:** Writing down my top two priorities before I start.
- **What gets in my way:** Vague deadlines, and plans that change without warning.
- **When things go wrong:** Take ten minutes away from the screen, then do the easiest task on my list.

The template is on the next page. You can also download a version you can type into at andreaantal.com.

How I work best

Name _____ Date _____

What helps me

What gets in my way

When things go wrong, I...

I'll look at this again on: _____

From "Your first week after an ADHD diagnosis" · andreaantal.com

ADHD words, explained

Body doubling: working alongside another person, in the room or online, to help you start and keep going.

Executive functions: the brain's management skills: starting, planning, remembering, keeping track of time, switching tasks, and managing feelings.

Hyperfocus: becoming so absorbed in something interesting that you lose track of time and everything around you.

Masking: hiding or making up for ADHD traits so other people don't notice. It can be exhausting, and it's one reason ADHD is often missed in women.

Rejection sensitivity: a strong emotional reaction to criticism or the feeling of being rejected. It's an informal term, and many people with ADHD recognise it.

Time blindness: finding it hard to sense time passing, or to judge how long things will take.

Working memory: the brain's whiteboard for holding information while you use it.

Where to go next

On andreaantal.com, all free

- **ADHD explained:** the basics, with sources
- **Help for you:** articles and printables for work, home, feelings, and getting things done
- **Find the right help:** who does what in the UAE, how to check a licence, and free listings
- **Quizzes:** five minutes each, for a clearer picture of how you work

ADHD Curious My free weekly newsletter: practical tools, real stories, and ADHD news from the UAE, every Sunday. You'll get it after this guide, and you can unsubscribe at any time.

Workshops One-hour sessions, online or in Dubai. Register your interest on the website and you'll be the first to hear dates.

One-to-one coaching Leave your details on the website and you'll be the first to hear when coaching opens.

When to get more help Talk to your doctor if things feel harder after the diagnosis rather than easier, if low mood or worry lasts more than a couple of weeks, or if you're struggling to cope at work or at home. If you're in danger or thinking about harming yourself, call 999 or go to your nearest emergency department.

Sources: NHS, ADHD in adults (nhs.uk/conditions/adhd-adults) · NIMH, ADHD: the basics (nimh.nih.gov) · Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, ADHD: strategies and support (leicspart.nhs.uk) · Last checked: 25 November 2026

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