

ADHD

Lifestyle steps for better focus

A lot of things can keep ADHD medications from working: Sleep deprivation, marijuana, processed foods, and a sedentary lifestyle. Here are simple ways to maximize their benefits.

Marijuana-free

ADHD medications did not work when they were tested in active users of marijuana. Why? Marijuana causes all the symptoms of ADHD, even in people without the disorder.

Video games

These can help ADHD, but the trick is to play for no more than 20 minutes a day. The FDA has even approved a game that reduces ADHD symptoms (EndeavorRx on back).

Sleep

Every hour of sleep deprivation is like lowering your stimulant by 10-20 mg. For insomnia, try the *CBT-i Coach* app or steps under *Sleep* at chrisaikenmd.com/brochures.

Light at night impairs learning and concentration the next day, especially blue light. Sleep in a dark room and wear blue-light blocking glasses 1-2 hours before bed to deepen sleep and improve cognition:
chrisaikenmd.com/darktherapy

Brisk Walking

Aerobic exercise is very effective for ADHD. The dose is 45 minutes every other day of brisk walking, dancing, or anything that gets your heart rate up:
chrisaikenmd.com/briskwalking

Team sports have an even bigger effect, perhaps because they engage the mind and body.

Nature

Best Nutritional Practices for ADHD		
Food	Daily Servings	Examples
Vegetables	4-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh, frozen, raw, and cooked all work Berries and dark green vegetables have particular brain benefits
Fruits	2-3	
Whole grains	2-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steel cut oats, brown rice, quinoa, spelt, barley, rye, amaranth, farro Unprocessed sources are preferred; otherwise, select products labeled "100% whole grain"
Lean meats	<6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wild fresh, frozen, or canned seafood Free-range poultry, pastured lamb, and grass-fed beef are suggested Eggs count (1 egg = 1 serving)
Nuts and seeds	2-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-salt nuts are preferred Nut butters are fine, but aim for those that are low in sugar, salts, and preservatives
Beans	1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lentils, chickpeas, black beans
Dairy	2-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plain unsweetened yogurt; cheeses (Swiss, feta, and Parmesan are best)
Fats and oils	2-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extra-virgin olive oil is preferred for brain and heart health
Foods to Avoid		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sweets, sodas, added sugars, refined grains Fried, fast, packaged, or processed food Hot dogs, bacon, sausage, and deli meats Artificial dyes or colorings, sodium benzoate, and BPA (minimize canned foods and drinks, use BPA-free plastics, and do not microwave in plastics) 		

Walking in the woods improves ADHD more than walking in the suburbs. Aim for a few hours a week of contact with nature.

ADHD Diet

The Mediterranean style diet above improves ADHD. Find more brain friendly foods at: chrisaikenmd.com/antidepressantdiet.

Health

Just about any physical health problem can worsen ADHD, including obesity, diabetes, vascular disease, post-viral syndromes, and vitamin deficiencies. Sleep apnea is a strong cause, and 20-30% of people with ADHD have this problem (including children). Signs include loud snoring, awakening gasping for air,

headaches, fatigue, obesity, high blood pressure, and neck thickness.

Supplements

Natural therapies that improve ADHD symptoms include omega-3, coenzyme Q10, l-carnosine, phosphatidylserine, and micronutrient megavitamins like Empowerplus. Ask us to learn about the benefits, risks, and which dose and product is right for you.

Mindfulness

This simple practice improved ADHD in several clinical trials. Try it out with your therapist or in an app (scroll to ADHD at): chrisaikenmd.com/apps

Focused Environment

Study in a quiet, brightly lit, organized environment or with a study partner to keep you engaged. Take a break to move around for 5 minutes every 20-30 minutes, or when you come to a natural stopping point.

Music or no music? It varies by person. Some prefer music without words like classical, ambient, or binaural beats in the beta, gamma, or alpha frequency.

Daily rhythms matter. Think about what time of day you're best able to do creative work, structured work, and simple, tedious tasks.

Procrastination

Try the 10 minute rule. Choose a task you are avoiding, and commit to doing it for 10 minutes. If you are still dreading the effort at that point, stop; otherwise keep going.

Books and Apps for ADHD

Endeavor	FDA-cleared videogame that exercises attention and self-control. Adult version is over-the-counter (EndeavorOTC); child version is prescription (EndeavorRx).
Freedom, Cold Turkey, Stay Focused	These block distracting website while you work
Forest	Earn rewards for focused time away from distracting apps
The Adult ADHD App	Solid education on ADHD and tools to improve focus (sponsored by ADHD Ireland)
Inflow	A full program with strategies and coaching tools for teens and adults with ADHD
Sensory Diet (BrainWorks)	An evidence-based program for children and adults to manage sensory processing, focus, and self-regulation through structured sensory breaks and activities
Mindfulness apps	Research-backed apps include Headspace, Calm, and free versions: Insight Timer, and Smiling Mind.
Books	Mastering Your Adult ADHD
Find them at chrisaikenmd.com/apps	

—Chris Aiken, M.D., updated 9/10/2025