

# THE MANY FACES OF ADHD

The theme for this year's ADHD Awareness Month is "The Many Faces of ADHD." In that spirit, here are 11 essays from ADDers—young and old, men, women, and child—that explore the diversity and perspectives of those diagnosed with the disorder.

**ROBERT  
TOTH**  
SCULPTOR,  
ARTIST,  
SALISBURY, NC



I STAYED BACK IN THE FOURTH grade three times. I was a straight-F student. The school called my mother and told her to send me to a private school, which she couldn't afford.

Then, at 14, I had an epiphany. Two teachers put together a demonstration in science class one day. As soon as I saw it, it was as if I awoke from a long sleep. It excited and inspired me. My teachers discovered that I was a visual learner, which was something my mother, a painter, knew intuitively.

As a result, I enrolled in art school at 21, and started my own design firm when I was 26. I sculpt busts of famous people, many of whom were thought to have learning disabilities—Einstein, Mozart, Edison, da Vinci. Some of my sculptures are in the Smithsonian.

When I sculpt and paint, I don't need medication. I don't feel like I have ADHD. There is hope for ADD children. My mom was the making of me. You can be the making of your child.

**HOWIE  
MANDEL**  
ENTERTAINER,  
COMEDIAN,  
LOS ANGELES, CA



I WAS DIAGNOSED WITH ADHD AND OCD AS AN ADULT, BUT I DON'T remember a time when I didn't have them. Back in the 1960s, when I was growing up, my symptoms didn't have a name, and you didn't go to the doctor to find out. They were called "Howie."

As I grew older, those quirks found their way into my comedy. *Deal or No Deal* works nicely with my ADHD symptoms. I show up, meet

the contestants, and move around the set. I'm not stuck behind a pedestal reading trivia questions. I've always had problems sitting still and listening for long periods of time.

My parents accepted my quirks and differences. I have the best family—everyone shows me nothing but love, support, and strength. If you asked my wife about my ADHD, she would say it's difficult to deal with. She can't get through a conversation with me without having to reel me back in.

After I impulsively revealed on a talk show that I have OCD, I was devastated. I often do things without thinking. That's my ADHD talking. Out in public, after I did the show, people came up to me and said, "Me, too." These were the most comforting words I ever heard. Whatever you're dealing with in life, know that you're not alone. Adults should know that it's never too late to seek help for ADHD. I didn't let ADHD prevent me from achieving my goals, and neither should you.

➔ **On the Web** Get more information and on 2013 ADHD Awareness Month at [ADHDawarenessmonth.org](http://ADHDawarenessmonth.org).

# ADHD AWARENESS MONTH

**DARLEENA WILLIAMS**

BUYER,  
HUNTINGTON  
BEACH, CA



I DIDN'T ALWAYS RECOGNIZE MY ADHD TRAITS AS A BLESSING OR a roadmap to my goals in life. It wasn't until I accepted my intricately wired brain, and embraced who I am, that my life changed. I stopped being a shadow of everyone's expectations. I could say, "This is who I am, love me or leave me!"

ADHD makes me curious about many things. My interests range from Italian cooking to knowing how DVDs are made. I can watch the History Channel for hours or a Disney cartoon while eating dinner. Some mornings I relax while listening to Beethoven, but later in the day, I'm dancing to rap music. Life

is rarely boring for me.

Such a range of interests has allowed me to connect with people from all walks of life. Everyone has a story, and most stories include lessons learned, or what Oprah calls "aha moments." These little trinkets of information evoke compassion and empathy for others. I get excited when I talk with people. If my brain was being scanned during conversations, it would be lit up like a Christmas tree.

My ADHD brain craves stimulation, and what better way to stimulate it than to meet a lot of people. This is why I'm always joining groups and clubs, and getting involved in the community. My personality puts others at ease, so they share their stories. These abilities have allowed me to excel at work. There are others who may be more qualified to do my job, but the compassion and teamwork I bring to the workplace has gained respect. I've been at the same company for 23 years.

Now I can appreciate my ADHD brain. It's something I feel good about.

**MAURA LADINO**

GRADUATE  
STUDENT,  
NEW YORK, NY



I FINISHED MY MASTER'S DEGREE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN one year, with straight A's. Who thought I could do it? I did. Because I knew what is inside of me, and I want the world to see it, too.

I was diagnosed with ADHD in second grade. During my school career, I had trouble on timed tests and in getting organized. In college, even with accommodations, I had difficulty with taking tests. It

took me a year to prepare for the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). Yet, I would not change my ADHD for the world. Without ADHD, I would not be me.

The way I approach any problem is by piecing things together. Sometimes my strategy is a little different from my peers', but I still find the solution. In fact, I am a rigorous puzzle-solver. Every night I complete several Sudokus faster than anyone I know.

As I learned about ADHD, I decided I wanted to learn more about the field of psychology. I love helping others who have the condition. I make it easier for them to gain insight about and accept themselves. I have served on panels to increase awareness about disabilities among educators. My goal is to work as a neuropsychologist to diagnose those with ADHD and learning disabilities and help them to live a successful life.

I am not defined by ADHD; I define it. My ADHD takes a backseat to my ambitions and goals, because I am the driver of my life, not my ADHD.

**DYLAN THOMPSON**

MIDDLE SCHOOL  
STUDENT,  
LENEXA, KS



A LOT OF SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE HAD ADHD. ONE OF THEM IS Albert Einstein, who developed the theory of relativity. Another ADHD person was Benjamin Franklin, who invented bifocals. Another was the composer Beethoven. George Bush, Sr., and George Bush, Jr., have ADHD, and they were presidents of the United States.

In school, ADHD kids get distracted and squirm in their seats.

ADHD kids are constantly in motion, and cannot complete a quiet task without making noise. Some kids talk nonstop and are very impatient. They sometimes act without thinking. It is hard for them to control themselves because their limbic system doesn't function like other peoples' brains. They need their teacher to understand that they have ADHD, so the teacher won't think that they're rude, disrespectful, or acting up on purpose.

Teachers also need to learn about ADHD, so they know that kids aren't choosing to act this way. They need to speak to them without hurting their feelings, and let them learn in their own way. Homeschooling can be good for a kid with ADHD, because he will be with people who understand him and know how to talk to him. Kids in home school aren't easily distracted, because they can take breaks, which calms their brain down to get more work done.

I know these things because I have ADHD, too. ADHD makes you seem like you are rude to other people, and that can make parents think that their kids shouldn't be around you. I want kids to know that I am just a person with a different kind of brain, not a bad person. I think I am a good person because I care about others, I'm funny, and I'm smart.

**CYNTHIA GERDES**

RESTAURATEUR  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN



AS AN ENTREPRENEUR, I FIND that ADHD is a boon. It's easy to do a million things at once. I own Hell's Kitchen—an award-winning restaurant in Minneapolis—but I started my career as a teacher and owned several successful toy stores before I entered the restaurant business. I was always able to work the long hours my jobs demanded, but when it came to smaller tasks, like food shopping, I was lost.

When I found I had ADHD, I finally understood why I had more energy than everyone else. I attribute some of my behavior to ADHD, especially my frequent changes in careers. I like to get a project off the ground, but I move on when things settle into a routine.

I make adjustments in my schedule to keep my ADHD in check. I won't do two meetings in a row, because I know I can't sit still that long. Taking breaks while reviewing bills or menus helps, too.

I still have problems with grocery shopping. My husband is supportive. He is amused when I spin in circles around the house. Thank God, he is a chef!

# ADHD AWARENESS MONTH

**EVELYN  
POLK-GREEN**  
EDUCATION  
ADMINISTRATOR,  
CHICAGO, IL



I CAN MULTITASK BECAUSE OF MY ADHD. IT HELPS ME KEEP ALL OF my projects straight. As a former president of ADDA, and a project director at an organization that provides training to parents and professionals in education, I know firsthand that there are advantages to having ADD. My mission is to help the world understand them.

In high school, I did well in a structured environment, but as a freshman at Duke University, I found it difficult to organize my days. I left without graduating. I got married and had a child and went back to school. I got my degree in early childhood education.

It wasn't until my oldest son was diagnosed with ADD, at age seven, that I began to recognize that I was coping with the disorder, too. I thought, "Oh, my God, that's me." I finally understood why I was able to be successful at work, but couldn't keep my house in order.

Figure out how the disorder affects you, and use your strengths to overcome your weaknesses. Choose a strategy—be it medication, therapy, or hiring a housekeeper—and stick with it. Your life will get better.

**SUSAN  
SCOTT**  
MENTAL HEALTH  
COUNSELOR,  
WEST PLAINS, MO



AHH, ME AND MY ADD. I'LL BE 67 YEARS OLD IN A COUPLE OF months, and it's been the two of us, hanging out and wandering around together for all 67 of them. I assume I was born with ADD. However, since it was 1945, ADD hadn't been "invented" yet. Everyone thought I was lazy, spaced-out, and crazy. They called me "annoying little Susie."

I earned two college scholarships, but I crashed and burned the first year in school, due to my still-undiagnosed, rip-roaring ADD. This was in the early 1960s. For the next two decades, I was a recurring guest at state and private mental hospitals.

In the mid-1980s, when I was correctly diagnosed, I was put on Ritalin—and my life began! I made it my job to find out everything I could about ADHD. I was a determined woman on a mission. Back then, not much had been written about the adult disorder, so we ADDers started writing things ourselves.

Today, I work as a Certified Peer Specialist, helping others like me adjust to the impact of their diagnosis. I encourage them to define their goals and figure out how to reach them by battling the stigma—the world's and their own—that may be holding them back.

So, listen up! No matter what stage of life you are in when you are diagnosed, rejoice! Now you know!

**PETER  
SHANKMAN**  
FOUNDER, THE  
GEEK FACTORY,  
NEW YORK, NY



WHEN I WAS A CHILD, MY MOM WOULD SAY, "YOU WALK TO THE beat of a different drummer, Peter. You are different, and this is your strength." But I didn't consider it a strength back then. Classmates made fun of me, and my teachers constantly told me to calm down.

I knew I had ADHD, so I put off getting diagnosed for a long while.

If you break your leg and there is a bone sticking out, you don't say, "Maybe I should see whether I have a broken leg."

I've considered taking medication, but I prefer to increase my dopamine levels by running, skydiving, and doing public speaking. ADHD boosted my career in many ways. It's spurred me to try new things and create new companies. It has enabled me to push past my fear and attempt what others believe to be impossible. My advice to you? Different is good, I swear. Don't ever forget that.

**JANE  
DOE**  
HOUSEWIFE,  
DALLAS, TX



BEFORE I WAS DIAGNOSED, I FELT I WAS CLIMBING A MOUNTAIN with no peak. For decades I had jobs that went nowhere. Too many abandoned endeavors took a toll on my self-confidence. My frustration and determination to get my act together led me to a therapist's office, where I told the story of my life.

Most of my life, I have felt lost and restless. I didn't have specific goals, so I worked at and quit jobs that were incompatible with my strengths. I once moved to another country to experience a different way of life. I took courses to learn new skills, and tried every workout DVD ever made. None of it made me a skinny, youthful millionaire, living in a foreign country, but I took chances to find out what life had in store for me.

I'm an expert at trying—and sometimes at failing. I know that, whatever happens, I will be OK. The challenges that ADD brings may leave me frustrated, but I would be bored without them.

**COSSONDR  
HOWARD**  
SCHOOL  
COUNSELOR,  
URIAH, AL



MY SON, NATHAN, HAS ADHD. He wouldn't be my Nathan without the energy of the "H." He's always been on the move. We've learned that together, through everyday situations and in everyday places, like the grocery store.

Grocery stores can be perilous when you're traveling with an ADHD child. When Nathan was small, he wanted everything he could reach to be in the grocery cart with him. He was especially fond of the frozen foods section, with its wide aisles and few displays. He could rev up the grocery cart with a running start.

Nathan's doctor took him off meds for two weeks. On the next visit, he asked how our weeks had gone. I looked at him and said, "Groceries." He closed his eyes and nodded knowingly. He'd been down that aisle of adventure himself!

We have lots of good memories at the grocery store. Before Nathan could talk, I called him "Mr. Personality." He would wave to anyone. As he got older, he started conversations with strangers—about the weather, sports teams, whatever. I got compliments on the nice, polite young man I was raising. They didn't know how hard it was to get him to stand still. Even in his rambunctiousness, he is thoughtful. I watched him sidle up to an older lady once and help her push her heavy cart to the checkout lane.

Now, at 14, he runs for items I've forgotten, charms the cashiers, and bags my groceries. The adventure is still there, but I appreciate the journey more—even when I wind up paying for stuff I didn't see him throw into the cart.