

HEADACHES

HEADACHES: 7 WAYS TO END THEM

# Natural Health

20 BEST  
ANTI-AGING  
SUPPLEMENTS

6 HEART-HEALTHY  
RECIPES PLUS: DECADENT  
FRUIT CRISPS (THAT ARE  
GOOD FOR YOU)

SIMPLE YOGA  
TO BOOST  
CONFIDENCE

HOME REMEDIES  
BURSITIS  
MENSTRUAL CRAMPS  
HANGNAILS

ASK THE EXPERTS  
MEN: ARE YOU  
SLEEPING ENOUGH?  
WOMEN: IS YOUR HAIR  
DYE KILLING YOU?

Allergy  
Relief  
Plan

STOP  
HAY FEVER  
FOREVER!



# Is Distraction a Disease?

FOR SEVERAL MONTHS Elizabeth Hulings was unable to concentrate long enough to do even the simplest tasks. She would call her children's pediatrician to make an appointment, but after being on hold for a short time would forget why she was even on the phone. Or she would make plans to meet friends for lunch but when the day arrived she'd absent-mindedly go shopping instead.

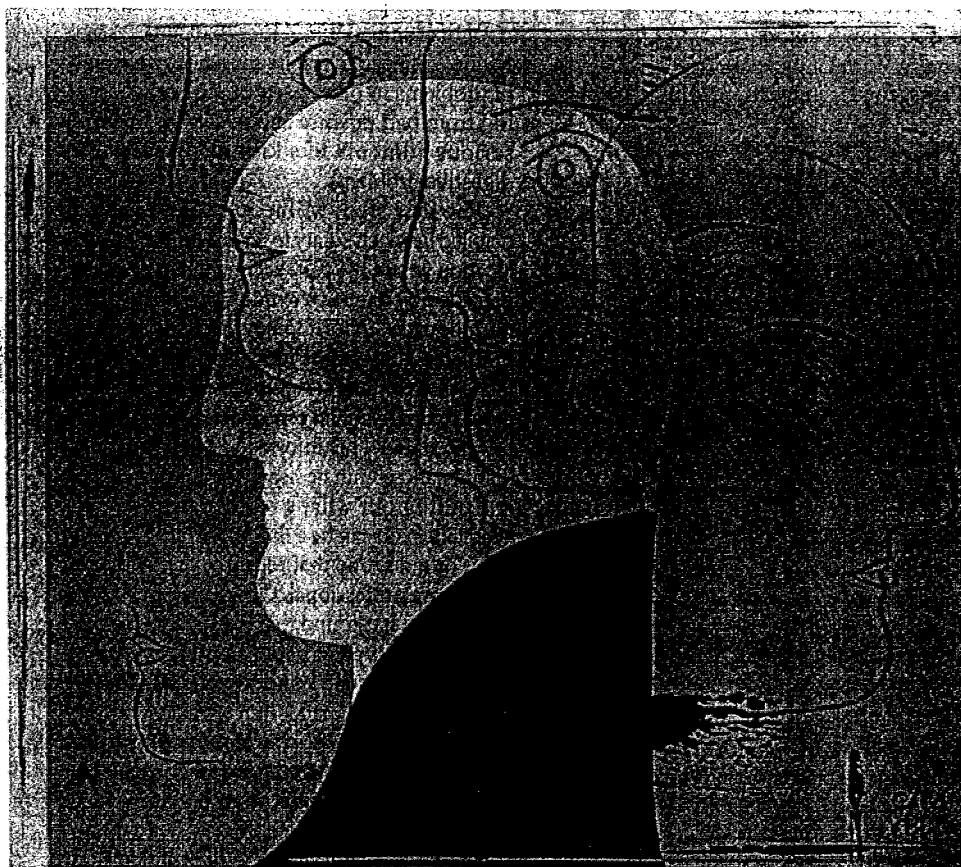
One day Hulings read a magazine article about the adult form of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), more commonly known as attention deficit disorder. The 38-year-old housewife and mother noticed that she had all the symptoms: a short attention span, poor organizational skills, and tendencies toward forgetfulness, impatience, procrastination, and restlessness. As she read, Hulings was impressed with the promise of Ritalin, a stimulant drug commonly prescribed to both children and adults to treat ADHD. She met with her doctor and asked for a Ritalin prescription.

After a complete exam, her doctor concluded that Hulings didn't have ADHD but instead suffered from moderate depression, for which he prescribed an antidepressant drug. She at least was relieved to learn what was causing her symptoms, and she was struck by how easily she had misdiagnosed her ailment.

Hulings's story is not unusual. ADHD was once thought to affect only children, who were presumed to outgrow the disorder. But now researchers say it can continue into adulthood. (By definition, ADHD starts before age 7, even if the symptoms aren't noticeable until much later.) As ADHD and its touted "miracle cure," Ritalin, gain increasing attention, many experts say more and more adult patients are misdiagnosing themselves with the disorder. This is not hard to understand when you realize that ADHD's symptoms could apply to almost anyone at some time or another. More worrisome, though, is that many doctors may also be wrongly applying the ADHD label to their adult patients and prescribing them Ritalin and similar drugs.

"Today, any high level of inattention or hyperactivity is attributed to ADD in the U.S. This is a huge mistake. There are many possible

Are you impatient? Forgetful? Scattered? You could be experiencing stress or an ailment like hypoglycemia—or maybe you have adult attention deficit disorder. Do we really know where to draw the line?



reasons for an adult showing an increase in these very generic, everyday behaviors," says Richard DeGrandpre, Ph.D., a psychology professor at St. Michael's College in Colchester, Vt., and author of *Ritalin Nation* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), in which he criticizes America's obsession with performance and quick satisfaction and the country's reliance on Ritalin, a performance-enhancing drug.

Many conditions can masquerade as ADHD, including depression, hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), food allergies, an overactive thyroid gland, hormonal imbalances, lead poisoning, and an overload of pesticides, according to Allan Magaziner, D.O., an osteopath and director of the Magaziner Center for Wellness and Anti-Aging

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## Mental Health

Medicine in Cherry Hill, N.J., where he specializes in several ailments including ADHD. Other conditions that may be mistaken for this disorder include candidiasis (yeast overgrowth), B vitamin deficiencies, and even adverse reactions to aspartame (the sweetener known as NutraSweet). Indeed, many of the symptoms of this disorder may just be the result of stress.

**A DISTRACTING DISORDER** The support group Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder estimates that 2 to 5 million American adults have the disorder. (In comparison, the group says up to 2.6 million children and teenagers have ADHD.) As the number of people diagnosed with the disorder has grown, so has the manufacture of the drugs used to treat it. Ritalin production in the United States increased 600 percent from 1985 to 1995, according to the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). While Ritalin is used for other conditions such as narcolepsy, most of its usage is attributed to ADHD.

And yet no one knows what ADHD is exactly. Last November the National Institutes of Health (NIH) convened a Consensus Development Conference—a type of “science court” that handles controversial medical topics—to discuss the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD. The conference experts concluded that there is no valid diagnostic test for the disorder, making some skeptical that the condition even exists. According to the conference report, “Clinicians who diagnose this disorder have been criticized for merely taking a percentage of the normal population who have the most evidence of inattention... and labeling them as having a disease.”

The standard guide in the psychiatric profession, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Press, 1994), requires that someone display six examples of inattentive or hyperactive behavior to earn the label of ADHD. These symptoms must be disruptive in two settings, such as work and home. The behaviors include making careless mistakes, losing things, feeling restless at desk jobs, and interrupting conversations. Some doctors have even viewed the habits of scanning radio channels in the car and not finishing books as signs of the disorder.

**WHEN A DIAGNOSIS IS MADE** Despite the uncertainty of what ADHD is, many doctors are not tentative about how to treat the symptoms. Many prescribe Ritalin. In fact, according to DeGrandpre, the United States consumes about 80 to 90 percent of all Ritalin in the world. “The profit incentives for using drugs

are tremendous,” says Marcia Zimmerman, a nutritional biochemist and author of *The A.D.D. Nutrition Solution: A Drug-Free 30-Day Plan* (Owl Books, 1999). Doctors who prescribe only dietary changes (such as routing out food allergies, which have been linked to ADHD symptoms) or other nondrug options are in the minority.

Because it's a stimulant, like caffeine and speed, Ritalin can help anyone be more focused and alert. The NIH conference panel noted that randomized clinical studies have shown that Ritalin and similar drugs do work in treating ADHD, but the panel acknowledged that most of these studies have lasted only a couple of months, whereas patients can stay on Ritalin for years. According to the panel there are no studies spanning several years.

What is known is that Ritalin has potential side effects, including decreased appetite, insomnia, nervousness, nausea, dizziness, headache, and blood pressure fluctuations. As

Exercise requiring deliberate movements, such as yoga, tai chi, and dance, can train your mind to focus.

a psychostimulant, the drug can be habit-forming and is prone to abuse, so the DEA controls its production. The *Physicians' Desk Reference* (Medical Economics Company, 1998), a guide to prescription drugs and their effects, reports that Ritalin has caused cancer in lab mice and “the significance of these results to humans is unknown.”

**HOW TO LEAD A FOCUSED LIFE** Whether ADHD is a soaring epidemic or simply myriad misdiagnosed symptoms, it is clear that many Americans are in search of ways to be free of feelings of impatience, distraction, and disorganization and to live more focused, balanced lives. These measures can bring anyone closer to these goals.

■ **Follow Your Nature**—Ayurvedic medicine recognizes that the body has natural rhythms, making certain activities better suited to certain times of the day. For example, early-morning exercise can prepare you for the mental and physical activity of your workday, while going to bed before 10 p.m.—before your internal energies shift gears—ensures a restful sleep.

The *dinacharya*, Ayurveda's recommended daily schedule, goes like this: Wake up before sunrise (between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m.), empty the bladder and bowels, bathe, and exercise. Meditate as the sun rises (and again, later in the day, as it sets). Finish breakfast before

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8 a.m. Eat your largest meal of the day at midday. At dinner, eat light and then perform light exercise. Lights out at 10 p.m.

No matter what schedule you adopt, make sure it's regular. For recommendations on how to use Ayurvedic principles to organize your day, see *The Book of Ayurveda: A Holistic Approach to Health and Longevity* by Judith H. Morrison (Fireside, 1995).

■ **Keep Track**—Buy a spiral notebook to use as your daily record book. "This is where you make all your notes—notes about telephone conversations, ideas for a project you're doing—so that you get rid of those scraps of paper," says Ronni Eisenberg, author of *Organize Yourself!* (Macmillan General Reference, 1997) and other time-management books. "It becomes an archive of information. It's all in one place." As you draw up daily to-do lists in your book, she advises trying to do one less activity or chore a day, rather than one more.

■ **Ignore the Bell**—Answering the telephone every time it rings forces you to drop one project and pick up another, interrupting your train of thought, Eisenberg says. Instead she suggests letting your answering machine or voice mail pick up the phone. Then return your calls all at once or whenever you have free time.

■ **Exercise Body and Mind**—Exercise that requires a series of deliberate steps or movements can train your mind to focus. John Ratey, M.D., a psychiatry professor at Harvard Medical School in Boston and co-author of *Driven To Distraction: Recognizing and Coping With Attention Deficit Disorder From Childhood Through Adulthood* (Simon & Schuster, 1995), recommends yoga, tai chi, and dance (make sure it's structured dance, not free-form).

■ **Slow Down**—Watching television, surfing the Internet, playing video games, and doing other "plugged-in" activities bombard us with rapid-fire images, sounds, and ideas. They can all accelerate the speed of our lives, says DeGrandpre, leaving us feeling hurried, scattered, and unsatisfied. To slow down your pace, he recommends every couple of days replacing a half-hour of a plugged-in activity with a half-hour of an unplugged activity that more fully engages you, such as reading and playing group card games. The goal is to eliminate—or measurably reduce—your participation in overstimulating activities.

■ **Eat Smart**—Think of the essential fatty acid docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) as a brain food, says Zimmerman. One of the omega-3 fatty acids, DHA serves as the primary building block in the gray matter of the brain and is essential for mental function and brain

development at any age. Eat plenty of fresh cold-water fish such as sardines, salmon, and tuna—the best dietary source. Seaweeds such as hijiki, nori, and kombu also contain the fatty acid. DHA supplements, derived from fish oil or algae, are another option. Zimmerman also suggests adding flaxseeds to your diet; your body can make DHA from flaxseeds.

Additionally, Zimmerman recommends loading up on antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables. Antioxidants—including vitamins A, C, and E and beta carotene—protect all parts of the body, including the brain, from damage by free radicals. Eat lots of leafy green vegetables, red and yellow fruits and vegetables, grains, and nuts, or supplement with an antioxidant formula.

James Greenblatt, M.D., a psychiatrist in Newton, Mass., and member of the clinical faculty at Boston's Harvard Medical School says protein provides the brain with the amino acids that make dopamine and norepinephrine, two brain chemicals that may enhance concentration. "Less carbohydrate and hyper protein can make a big difference for some people," he says. "You can see an incredible change just eating two eggs for a few days in a row."

Siobhan Fitzpatrick is a freelance writer in New York City.



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