

An Essential Guide to Supporting ADHDeers with Eating Differences

A Neuroaffirming Checklist for Dietitians Working With Eating Differences in Adolescents and Adults

Key Considerations for Practice

Research shows that ADHDeers have higher rates of all eating disorders, not just binge-type disorders, as executive functioning differences can significantly impact food access, preparation, and consumption patterns.

Executive Functioning Support

- Encourage creative solutions tailored to the individual
- Recommend keeping non-perishable foods visible and accessible
- Consider meal kits or pre-prepared options
- Suggest body doubling (eating/cooking with others)
- Make mealtimes more engaging (watching shows, listening to music)
- Help develop flexible meal plans based on varying energy levels
- The strategies that work for each client will vary and different strategies may be needed depending upon the domain of executive functioning in which differences occur

Medication and Appetite

- Be aware that stimulant medications often suppress appetite
- Consider scheduling meals before medication
- Focus on nutrition needs rather than hunger cues
- Advocate for medication adjustments if needed
- Document and communicate appetite changes to prescribing clinicians

Working with Eating Patterns

- Normalise that binge eating may be a response to inadequate nutrition
- Address any underlying food rules or restrictions
- Understand that eating for stimulation is common and not inherently problematic
- Support development of regular eating patterns while accommodating ADHD preferred eating styles
- Recognise that food hyperfixations are common and may cycle
- Support development of regular eating patterns while accommodating ADHD preferred eating styles and accommodates individual preferences. That is, it doesn't have to be 6 times a day, or it may be more



Practical Accommodations

- Suggest online grocery shopping with saved lists
- Recommend disposable plates/cutlery when washing dishes is a barrier
- Create systems for meal reminders
- Make hydration more engaging (flavoured water, fun bottles)
- Support use of caffeine mindfully while ensuring adequate nutrition

Exercise and Movement

- Recognise that exercise often helps manage ADHD symptoms
- Assess the internal experience and motivation for movement
- Help find safe alternatives when movement needs modification
- In the context of eating disorders, be cautious about assumptions regarding exercise motivation (eg. assuming drive to exercise is always disordered)

During Periods of Burnout

- Minimise food-related demands
- Focus on accessible nutrition options
- Increase support and accommodate increased sensory sensitivities
- Prioritise rest and reduced expectations

Remember

- ADHDers often develop creative coping strategies - work with these
- Focus on function over form - traditional "proper meals" may not be realistic
- Challenge neurotypical assumptions about eating patterns
- Accommodate sensory preferences without requiring diagnosis
- Support flexible approaches that work with ADHD traits rather than against them

This article is based on current research and clinical practice guidelines for supporting ADHDers with eating and nutrition needs.

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