

Anxious, Stressed, Lonely, or Bored?

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ADULT ADHD?

Email them to attention@chadd.org and highly qualified experts will respond.

I struggle with picking scabs, the skin around my nails, basically any non-smooth areas of skin on my body. I'm wondering if this is ADHD-related. What can I do about it?

It could be ADHD-related, and it could be something else. While picking and fidgeting can be forms of restlessness in ADHD, there is also a condition of picking at the skin called excoriation disorder. With ADHD, you may be more likely to pick when you are bored or feeling anxious. When you keep your hands occupied or practice a stress-relieving activity like exercise, your picking generally decreases. If you have excoriation disorder, you have a compulsion to pick; distracting yourself and stress-relieving activities do not work or even make your compulsion worse.

Try distracting yourself with something that keeps your hands busy. Many people with ADHD do handcrafts, and there is even jewelry available that has movable parts so you can discharge your extra energy that way. You can also use a fidget toy to discreetly keep your hands busy, possibly even at work. See if your picking decreases. If it does not, or gets worse, see a mental health professional.

Stephanie Moulton Sarkis, PhD, NCC, LMHC | Psychotherapist | Author, *10 Simple Solutions to Adult ADD* (2011)

I am an artist. My work has been sort of popular, but now I have trouble getting anything done. I walk into my studio or look at my computer and the anxiety kicks in and I can't get anything done. I'm afraid I'm going to miss opportunities because I cannot seem to work. Do you have any suggestions?

First, mix it up. Try something completely different and new. Shift mediums. My place is behind the camera or on the stage, but every once in a while I'll pick up a pair of drumsticks or grab some chalk or buy a can of spray paint and jam for a little while, until I get "the vibe" back. Dabbling in another form of art, even briefly, can remind you of the freedom you have to get messy, to explore, to workshop. And who knows? Maybe you'll even incorporate



some of what you've found into the project you've been struggling with.

Second, take long walks. Nikola Tesla developed his idea for alternating current in Budapest while walking and reciting poetry with a friend. The simple act of removing himself from his work allowed him to incubate an idea. For me, the treadmill down the street at Planet Fitness is where I incubate.

Somewhere between mile two and mile five, the synapses in my brain light up and I experience a distinct clarity. I plan out my entire day in my mind and even go so far as to work through large projects from start to finish—call it “mental gymnastics.” After the gym, I run home, shower, and get to work.

Third, jam out! Music. Steve Bochco (the writer-creator of *Hillstreet Blues*, *NYPD Blue*, and *LA Law*) once extolled the virtues of music over any other art form, calling it the “fastest acting drug. Quicksilver to the artists’ veins.” Find the right track for the project and let the creative juices flow!


Steven Tonti | Writer, director, public speaker | Adult with ADHD

The one thing that I struggle with more than anything else, and that has caused me the most problems in my life, is impulsive buying. It continues to be a strain with my better half. I've acquiesced and agreed to try stimulants, but I haven't noticed any significant effect in curbing my desire for the next new "shiny" thing. Any advice or help would be greatly appreciated.

Impulsive spending can be a common struggle for folks with ADHD and medication can be helpful in giving you a little more pause before buying something. This gives you time to really think about how this new item fits in with what you already have, as well as how it fits into the budget.

Given that stimulant medication isn't helping your spending, my first question would be whether the medication is helping in other ways. You may need to work with your prescriber to get the dose optimized, and then see what it does for your spending.

However, it is probably also worth spending some time thinking about what the overspending does for you and when you do it. Is it when you're bored, stressed out, lonely? Then work on other ways of addressing those feelings. Meanwhile, identify the situations where you tend to overspend and work on avoiding those places, just like alcoholics avoid bars. It will probably be helpful to include your spouse in these discussions so he or she can better understand this behavior as well as support your efforts to change.

Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA | Psychologist | Author, *Understand Your Brain, Get More Done* (2012) and *More Attention, Less Deficit* (2009) 

Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA, is a psychologist, author, and speaker. He serves as a member of CHADD's board of directors and co-chair of its conference committee.

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