

Some people with ADHD succeed in periods of stress, new study shows

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

- a. What do the letters ADHD stand for? Which of the words in the word cloud do you associate with ADHD? Why?



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2 Key words

a. Match the words in the word pool with their definitions. All the words appear in the article.

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------|---|
| 1. comorbid | _____ | a. changing or varying frequently, often in an irregular or unpredictable way |
| 2. counterintuitive | _____ | b. something that goes against what one would normally expect or believe |
| 3. deadline | _____ | c. a period in which the symptoms of a disease or condition decrease or disappear |
| 4. decompressing | _____ | d. consistent, stable |
| 5. downtime | _____ | e. referring to the presence of two or more medical conditions or disorders occurring simultaneously in a person |
| 6. fluctuating | _____ | f. the latest time or date by which something must be completed or submitted |
| 7. impulsivity | _____ | g. to unravel or straighten something that is twisted or complicated |
| 8. inhibit | _____ | h. a trained professional who assists women in childbirth, offering care and support during labour and delivery |
| 9. midwife | _____ | i. a period of time when something is not in use or is inactive |
| 10. neither | _____ | j. acting on sudden desires or urges without careful thought or consideration of the consequences |
| 11. remission | _____ | k. to hinder, restrain or prevent something from happening or developing |
| 12. steady | _____ | l. refers to not one nor the other of two options, choices or possibilities |
| 13. untangle | _____ | m. inside or enclosed by something, or within a particular limit or range |
| 14. wandering | _____ | n. moving aimlessly or without a fixed course |
| 15. within | _____ | o. the act of releasing built-up tension or stress, often through relaxation or engaging in an activity that allows for mental or emotional release |

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b. Use some of the key words from the previous activity to complete these sentences. You may need to change the form of the word.

1. Due to ongoing economic uncertainty, prices have been _____, making it difficult for consumers to plan their budgets.
2. The idea that stress can sometimes improve focus is _____ to most people's experience.
3. The doctor informed her that _____ could be temporary, so regular check-ups were advised.
4. Mandy's recovery has been slow but _____. She has been consistent in her treatments.
5. The patient has _____ diabetes and hypertension, so doctors need to carefully monitor her before and after her surgery.
6. The detective worked for hours to _____ the complicated clues and finally managed to solve the case.
7. His _____ often leads him to make rash decisions without really considering the consequences.
8. Certain medications may _____ your ability to concentrate for long periods of time.
9. Her mind kept _____ during the meeting, and she had trouble staying focused.
10. _____ of the two methods for improving focus seems to work for me, so I still struggle with concentration.

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Patients responded well in times of 'high environment demand' because sense of urgency led to hyperfocus

Hannah Harris Green

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- 1 A recent study has revealed that some people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) cope best during periods of high stress.
- 2 Maggie Sibley, a clinical psychologist and psychiatry professor at the University of Washington and the study's lead author, initially set out to learn whether it is possible for adults to recover from ADHD. In an earlier study, published in 2022, she investigated a National Institute of Mental Health data set that tracked 600 patients with ADHD over 16 years, starting from childhood.
- 3 "What we found was this pattern of fluctuating ADHD, and most of the people that were getting better, they would then get back to ADHD again," she said.
- 4 For the more recent study, published in the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, she went back to that same data set to try and figure out what circumstances might lead to relief from ADHD symptoms.
- 5 Sibley thought that ADHD patients would experience the most relief during periods of low stress. What she found was more counterintuitive.
- 6 Her study identified three different groups of ADHD patients: those who experienced periods of apparent full recovery, those who experienced partial remission, and those whose ADHD symptoms remained steady over time.
- 7 People who experienced temporary full recovery were most likely to experience it during times of "high environmental demand", or, put more simply, stress. Those who had periods of partial recovery were also more likely to have comorbid anxiety.
- 8 Arij Alarachi, a psychology PhD student at McMaster University who has researched ADHD and anxiety with St Joseph's hospital in Hamilton, Canada, says it makes sense that ADHD would respond differently to different circumstances.
- 9 ADHD brains might not change that much, said Alarachi, but people can adapt their circumstances to better cope with their ADHD. As Sibley's study shows, though, even among people with ADHD, those strategies might look different, since "ADHD comes in a lot of different shapes and sizes," Alarachi added.
- 10 "ADHD patients may do best when they have to rise to the occasion. And we see that on the micro level ... deadlines [could feel] helpful, or when things are more urgent, you're able to be your most productive and hyperfocus," said Sibley.
- 11 Although it's impossible to completely untangle how much this is a result of ADHD patients choosing to take on more stress when their symptoms are in check.
- 12 Sara Vranes, who was diagnosed with ADHD at 36, relates to this idea. She said she sees her ability to hyperfocus under pressure as a "superpower". Vranes now works with homeless communities, but had 15 years of experience as a midwife and doula before that, and she says she was most calm in crisis.
- 13 "I don't want anyone to be hurt, but I was able to handle it because my brain just can hyperfocus. I could see everything clearly and see a process in my mind, and act on it in real time." During downtime, however, she's often anxious and can't focus.
- 14 More than half of adults with ADHD also experience anxiety. But, Sibley's study shows this might not always be a bad thing.
- 15 "We call it a protective factor in ADHD," she said, explaining that multiple studies have found that children with ADHD and anxiety respond better to behavioural treatment, like cognitive behavioural therapy, than children who just have ADHD.
- 16 Alarachi said that in her research, too, she's come across people with ADHD who say anxiety helps them keep impulsivity in check. They will say: "My anxiety [has] kind of helped me stop myself from maybe acting on some of those impulses, or it's kind of made me think about some of the consequences."
- 17 "Think about it like the gas and the brakes in a car, right? The ADHD might be the gas, and then the anxiety is putting the brakes on, like getting people to inhibit a little bit," said Sibley.
- 18 Anxiety and impulsivity might be more extreme in people with ADHD, "but somehow they're cancelling each other out in a way that kind of makes neither of those processes as problematic as they might be on their own, which is kind of an interesting concept", Sibley added.

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- 19 Alarachi and Sibley agree that people with ADHD should look within to figure out how best to relax and keep their anxiety to a reasonable level where it's useful. Vranes has a hard time just relaxing in front of the TV, but says playing phone games and watching TV at the same time can help stop her mind from wandering.
- 20 Sibley has encountered ADHD patients who are most relaxed while exercising and socializing.
- 21 "I always tell people with ADHD, you have to learn to write your own owner's manual," Sibley said. "So you have to figure out, what is your brand of relaxation? What is your brand of decompressing?"

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions below based on the information from the article.

1. What was the main finding of Maggie Sibley's recent study about ADHD and stress?
2. What data set did Sibley use for her research, and how long was the follow-up period for the participants?
3. What was Sibley's initial assumption about the relationship between stress and ADHD symptom relief? How was her finding different?
4. What were the three groups of ADHD patients identified in Sibley's study?
5. How can you describe the people who seemed to temporarily fully recover from ADHD?
6. How did Arij Alarachi explain the different responses of ADHD patients to stress?
7. What role does anxiety play for some people with ADHD, according to Sibley's and Alarachi's findings?
8. According to Sibley, how does ADHD interact with anxiety?
9. How do people with ADHD often relax, according to Sibley's findings and Sara Vranes' experience?
10. What advice does Sibley give to ADHD patients regarding managing their symptoms and finding effective coping mechanisms?

b. Complete the sentences using words and phrases from the article.

1. Recent research has shown that individuals with ADHD _____ under pressure.
2. Sibley discovered that patients never truly recover and tend to _____ ADHD, even if they improve at times.
3. Arij Alarachi asserts that it is logical for ADHD to behave differently in _____.
4. People with ADHD may struggle to concentrate _____.

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5. Sibley explains that anxiety is called a(n) ' _____ ' in ADHD.
6. In fact, anxiety helps those with ADHD control their _____.
7. Experts agree that each individual should find strategies that help them ensure their anxiety remains _____.

4 Key language

a. Choose the correct options to complete the following sentences from the article.

Maggie Sibley, a clinical psychologist and psychiatry professor at the University of Washington and the study's lead author, initially set out to learn whether it is possible for adults to recover from ADHD. In an earlier study, published in 2022, she investigated a National Institute of Mental Health data set that (1) **tracked / surveyed / managed** 600 patients with ADHD over 16 years, starting from childhood.

For the more recent study, published last week in the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, she went back to that same data (2) **group / file / set** to try and figure out what circumstances might lead to relief from ADHD symptoms.

Sibley thought that ADHD patients would (3) **experience / receive / gain** the most relief during periods of low stress. What she found was more counterintuitive.

Her study identified three different groups of ADHD patients: those who experienced periods of apparent full recovery, those who experienced partial remission, and those whose ADHD symptoms (4) **kept / maintained / remained** steady over time.

People who experienced temporary full recovery were most likely to experience it during times of "high environmental demand" or, (5) **put / set / said** more simply, stress. Those who had periods of partial recovery were also more likely to have comorbid anxiety.

"ADHD patients may do best when they have to (6) **catch / rise / climb** to the occasion. And we see that on the micro level ... deadlines [could feel] helpful, or when things are more urgent, you're able to be your most productive and hyperfocus," said Sibley.

Although it's impossible to completely untangle how much this is a result of ADHD patients choosing to take on more stress when their symptoms are in (7) **range / place / check**.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

1. How do you typically perform when working under pressure? Do you think you thrive in high-stress situations, or do you struggle to maintain focus?
2. Can you identify specific scenarios or environments that tend to make you feel anxious or overwhelmed?
3. What strategies or techniques have you found most effective in managing stress or anxiety in high-pressure environments?
4. How do you think your environment (e.g. work, home, social) influences your ability to handle stress? Are there any changes you could make to improve your stress management in these areas?

6 In your own words

- a. In pairs or small groups, create a short survey to gather information about your classmates' attitudes and responses to stress and pressure, as well as techniques that help them to concentrate in different situations.
- b. Analyse your results and present your findings and conclusions to the class.
- c. Listen to your classmates' findings and take notes of any interesting conclusions you can add to yours.
- d. Create an infographic using both your own findings and at least one insight from another group and present it to your class.