

I was 36 when I was diagnosed with ADHD and it changed my life



My dad's nickname for me as a child was "The Whirlwind".

I was always on the go. I was skinny with knobby knees and couldn't finish anything I started, or I'd be so focused on whatever game I was playing that everything else faded away.

As early as my first year at school, my teachers approached my parents saying they thought I might have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, and suggested they consider putting me on Ritalin, the drug that treats the condition.

My parents were reluctant to put me on any kind of drug and took me to see a child behavioural psychologist instead. I remember him giving me fun games to play that I really enjoyed, and his assessment to my parents was that I was just a bright kid with a lot of energy and there was nothing wrong with me.

My teachers, on the other hand, said I was disruptive in class and couldn't sit still, I constantly interrupted - and my marks weren't great. As I was only six, I was oblivious to these conversations and my parents didn't discuss it with me.

I continued to be known as hyperactive and disruptive all through school. I was teased and bullied mercilessly because my reaction would be explosive - and therefore entertaining.

As a result, I went to seven schools but it was always the same: I excelled in the subjects I loved, and caused problems in the classes I hated. I know now that people with ADHD are either easily distracted or hyper-focused, depending on what they enjoy doing.

I also had difficulties socially. People often liked me at first but then found me a little strange; I'd blurt out things that others seemed to think were inappropriate, although they didn't feel inappropriate to me. And I interrupted a lot because my mind moved faster than other people's.

Sometimes when people started to realise I was unconventional and erratic, they'd retreat and I would be ostracised, which was incredibly hurtful.

As an adult in the working world, I left or got fired from every job I tried - and I tried all kinds: receptionist, data entry, project management, office admin, PA.

There were endless regimented jobs that didn't suit me, so I couldn't apply myself to a satisfactory level. I was often rebellious and resented being chained to the specific hours and behaviour expectations of the workplace.

I simply couldn't sit still for long periods and would often finish my day's work in a couple of hours and be left with nothing to do. Eventually I left the workforce altogether and explored non 9-5 options, like dancing.

But gradually I realised it would best suit me to work for myself from home.

I started making some money from freelance blogging and content creation and was lucky that my mother could help me out financially. I'm an only child and had always been very close to my mother and she was always sympathetic.

After studying to be an integrative nutrition coach for a year, I had big plans to set up my own practice and saw running a business as my chance to finally be a success at something.

However, I just could not focus enough to prioritise and do the things needed to set everything up to run a successful business.

By then I was in my 30s, with years of struggling behind me, so I became really down on myself, assuming that my problems were my fault. I've always known I am intelligent and capable - but why couldn't I get anything done and produce results?

When I looked back at the things in my life that hadn't worked out, I began to think there was something seriously wrong with me. Consistently trying and failing to do the things I wanted to do was so demoralising that eventually I just retreated from the world.

I didn't want to be around my friends because I felt embarrassed and humiliated about my failures.

Those feelings soon developed into a deep depression - something I had experienced before, but more serious and really debilitating. I became a recluse and wanted to die instead of live with this unexplained issue.

There was one upside to the depression: it finally led to my diagnosis at the age of 36. After a few months, I went to see my GP and he referred me to an assessor who talked through my symptoms and suggested I may have adult ADHD (although, like me, most adults tend not to have the hyperactivity part of the condition).

I remembered that my mother once told me that I had ADHD as a child and that my teachers begged her to put me on Ritalin.

But, although this may seem surprising, it had never occurred to me as an adult that I could have ADHD, partly because, like most people, I didn't know that it was possible to suffer from it after childhood.

After doing some research at home and reading a list of the symptoms, I was overcome by tears of relief.

I learned that ADHD in adults can appear alongside many related problems, one of the most common of which is depression; that any problems you had as a child are likely to persist; and that adults with ADHD often have trouble finding and keeping employment, as well as maintaining relationships.

I tick every single one of the symptoms, from speaking out of turn, to continually starting new tasks before finishing old ones, to an inability to deal with stress, to extreme impatience.

Having a diagnosis meant that, suddenly, my whole life made sense.

I could see why I had struggled so much to function like "normal people". Finally, I was able to stop blaming myself.

I was referred to a specialist psychiatrist and this year started taking a prescription drug, which is a slow-release stimulant that treats ADHD.

I also started taking an antidepressant.

Although it's still early days, once we found the right dose, the effects were immediate: I get things done now.

My to-do list is no longer a decoration, it actually gets crossed off. My house is tidier. And these days I can plan, prioritise and take action, so my online business is growing and I'm earning more money than I have before, all of which is life-changing.

Overall, I'm happier, more positive. The people in my life have noticed and are very happy for me. Most importantly, I no longer hate myself.

I'm not in a relationship at the moment and generally I still don't socialise much. People who meet me still think I am different - there's no change there!

But, on the whole, I am a happy go-getter, I'm confident and feel like I'm realising my dreams and goals in a way I've never been able to before.

In just a few months, the right medication has turned my life around, and - at last - I feel like I am thriving.

HOW IT FEELS TO HAVE ADULT ADHD

Adult ADHD manifests itself in a wide range of ways. Here are some of the symptoms.

Carelessness and lack of attention to detail.

- Forgetfulness and continually losing things.
- Continually starting new tasks before finishing old ones.
- Poor organisational skills and inability to focus or prioritise.
- Restlessness.
- Difficulty keeping quiet, and speaking out of turn.
- Blurting responses and poor social timing.
- Mood swings, irritability and a quick temper.
- Inability to deal with stress and extreme impatience.
- Taking risks in activities, often with little regard for personal safety, or the safety of others.

Source: *Stella Magazine, The Sunday Telegraph (UK)*