

# Understanding Your ADHD Brain

A one-page guide from Pathfinder Therapy

ADHD is not a character flaw, a lack of discipline, or a sign that something is broken. It is a neurological difference in how your brain regulates attention, motivation, and emotion. Understanding how your brain actually works is the first step toward working **with** it rather than against it.

## What's Actually Happening in Your Brain

ADHD is primarily a dopamine regulation issue. Your brain's prefrontal cortex - the part responsible for planning, impulse control, and sustained focus - doesn't get the consistent dopamine supply it needs to function optimally. This isn't about willpower. It's neurochemistry.

| The Concept                     | What It Means for You                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Interest-based attention</b> | Your brain doesn't prioritize by importance - it prioritizes by interest, novelty, urgency, or challenge. This is why you can hyperfocus on something fascinating but struggle with a simple email. |
| <b>Executive function gaps</b>  | Planning, time estimation, working memory, task-switching, and emotional regulation are all managed by the same brain systems affected by ADHD.                                                     |
| <b>Emotional dysregulation</b>  | ADHD emotions are often intense and fast. Rejection sensitivity, frustration spikes, and sudden mood shifts are part of the neurology - not a personality problem.                                  |
| <b>Time blindness</b>           | Your brain often experiences time as 'now' and 'not now.' Deadlines feel abstract until urgent, and task duration is hard to estimate.                                                              |
| <b>The dopamine hunt</b>        | Procrastination, novelty-seeking, and impulsivity often serve the same purpose: your brain is searching for the stimulation it needs. This is adaptive, not lazy.                                   |

## Common Myths Worth Letting Go Of

- **'You just need to try harder.'** ADHD is not an effort problem. You've likely been trying harder than most people your entire life.
- **'You can't have ADHD - you did well in school.'** Intelligence and ADHD are independent. Many high-performers succeeded through anxiety-driven compensation.
- **'ADHD is a childhood thing.'** ADHD does not disappear at 18. Late diagnosis is extremely common, especially in men.

- **'Medication is a crutch.'** Medication addresses a neurochemical difference, the same way glasses correct vision. It's a tool, not a weakness.

**What this means for therapy:** Understanding your ADHD brain helps us build strategies that actually fit how you think, feel, and move through the world. We don't try to make you neurotypical. We help you build a life that works for the brain you have.

*This guide is for informational purposes and does not replace a clinical assessment. If you suspect you have ADHD, speak with a qualified professional.*