

"[An] easy-to-read, yet sophisticated guide to what will help you most if you have ADHD... A superb book."—EDWARD HALLOWELL, coauthor of *Driven to Distraction*

# **FAST** **MINDS**

**How to Thrive If  
You Have ADHD**  
(Or Think You Might)

Craig Surman, M.D.  
Tim Bilkey, M.D.  
with Karen Weintraub

USA \$25.95  
Canada \$27.50

## FAST MINDS

**F**orgetful. **A**chieving below potential.  
**S**tuck in a rut. **T**ime challenged.  
**M**otivationally challenged. **I**mpulsive.  
**N**ovelty seeking. **D**istractible. **S**cattered.

If any or all of these symptoms are making it difficult for you—or someone you know—to live life to the fullest, then the clinically proven, cutting-edge program in this book will help you understand your struggles and challenges. Whether you have been diagnosed with ADHD, think you may have it, or just exhibit many of these traits, **FAST MINDS** will help you:

- Figure out what isn't working in your life, and the keys to fixing it.
- Build personalized strategies for managing your time, tasks, and relationships.
- Learn organizational habits that work for you.
- Stop communicating poorly, making impulsive choices and taking pointless risks.
- Eliminate negative thinking patterns that waste your mental energy.
- Create environments that support your challenges.
- Make the most of both medical and nonmedical resources (medication, coaching, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mindfulness, support groups, lifestyle change).

With inspiring stories of real people who have adapted and thrived using the methods in this book, **FAST MINDS** will help you create the kind of life you want to live.



Photo of Craig Surman by David Johnson

**Craig Surman, M.D.**, is an expert on ADHD in adulthood. He is an assistant professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and scientific coordinator for the internationally recognized Adult ADHD Research Program at Massachusetts General Hospital.



Photo of Tim Bilkey by Benjamin Lee

**Tim Bilkey, M.D.**, is a psychiatrist specializing in adult ADHD, having completed more than thirty-four hundred assessments. He is an international presenter and has produced two films on ADHD. He started one of the world's first ADHD clinics for women. In 2009, he developed a nationally accredited educational program for the rapid recognition of ADHD in adults called **FAST MINDS**.

**Karen Weintraub** is an award-winning journalist and a freelance health writer for the *Boston Globe*, *USA Today*, and other publications. Ms. Weintraub also teaches journalism at the Harvard Extension School and Boston University. Her first book, *The Autism Revolution*, was also published by Harvard Health Publications.

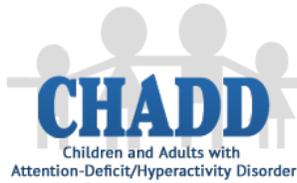


Harvard Health Publications  
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL  
*Trusted advice for a healthier life*

Cover design by Diana E. Kolsky

Visit our website at [www.penguin.com](http://www.penguin.com)

A BERKLEY BOOK  
Published by The Berkley Publishing Group  
A division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.  
375 Hudson Street  
New York, New York 10014



[Register](#) | [Login](#)

[Search](#)

[Report a problem](#)

Select Language ▼

[Understanding ADHD](#)   [Support](#)   [Advocacy](#)   [Training & Events](#)   [Membership](#)   [About CHADD](#)

[Home](#) » [Membership](#) » [Attention Magazine](#) » [View Articles](#)

### Latest Issue

- [Building Competence through Chores](#)
- [ADHD and the Decision to Medicate](#)
- [Embracing Differences](#)
- [Thriving with FAST MINDS](#)
- [Developing a Brain Filter](#)
- [Effects of Childhood ADHD on Adult Employment](#)
- [LETS Erase the Stigma](#)
- [Is There an App for That?](#)
- [Reorganizing and Renewing](#)
- [Teacher Wish List](#)

### Most Viewed

- [Developing a Brain Filter](#)
- [ADHD and the Decision to Medicate](#)
- [Thriving with FAST MINDS](#)
- [Parenting Young Adults with ADHD](#)
- [Embracing Differences](#)
- [What Should I Feed](#)
- [Social IQ](#)
- [PP Mindfulness and Adult ADHD](#)
- [Mind Mapping](#)
- [PP WorryWise Kids](#)

### Archives

- 2013 (10)
  - [February \(10\)](#)
  - [April \(0\)](#)
  - [June \(0\)](#)
  - [August \(0\)](#)
  - [October \(0\)](#)
  - [December \(0\)](#)
- 2012 (72)
  - [December \(12\)](#)
  - [October \(12\)](#)
  - [August \(12\)](#)
  - [June \(11\)](#)

## Thriving with FAST MINDS

Categories: [2013](#), [February](#)



by **Craig Surman, MD, and Tim Bilkey, MD, with Karen Weintraub**

**OFTEN WHEN CLINICIANS DIAGNOSE ADHD**, they look for obvious signs of impairment such as being dismissed from jobs or poor grades at school. But this focus on external consequences misses what it's like to live with these characteristics every day. It fails to capture the most common burden of what we call FAST MINDS traits: the extra time and effort it takes to compensate—such as late hours at work making up for the constant distractions during the day, or last-minute cramming on projects that won't get done without deadline pressure.

People with FAST MINDS may be living with the constant stress of being reactive rather than proactive—handling demands at the last minute, under stress, rather than being prepared and feeling confident. They may spend their time constantly double-checking themselves to make sure they haven't made a mistake. This extra effort may get them by at work or school but leaves little time and energy for themselves or a social life. They may suffer demoralization, anxiety, or other distress because of the impact of FAST MINDS traits on their lives. Yet often, only those closest to them know how hard they work to succeed.

#### FAST MINDS explained

FAST MINDS is an acronym for the challenges of living with ADHD.

When reading the following traits, see if they reflect your experience (or those of someone you care about).

- **FORGETFUL:** Do you forget what people have told you? Do you forget where you put things? Do you need reminders for every day things? Do you miss appointments?
- **ACHIEVING BELOW POTENTIAL:** Do you feel you underachieve? Do you feel you should be getting better grades than you do at school, or should have made it further than you have in your career?
- **STUCK IN A RUT:** Are you having a hard time moving ahead in your life? Do you feel like you're trapped trying to keep your head above water, playing catch-up instead of living how you want to? Are you stuck in important areas of your life, such as at work or in school?
- **TIME CHALLENGED:** Are you often late? Do you often underestimate the amount of time that things take? Does time drift away? Do you have trouble figuring out how long a task is "supposed" to take?
- **MOTIVATIONALLY CHALLENGED:** Are you a procrastinator? Do you do things at the last minute

April (12)  
February (13)  
2011 (67)

Show All Categories >>

Try brain training tested  
by dozens of researchers



**lumosity**

Start Training →

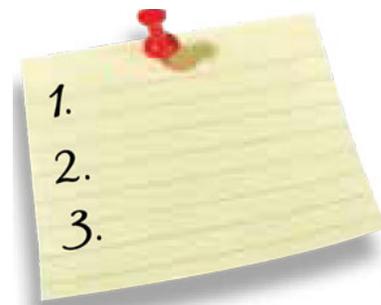
ADVERTISEMENT

or need the pressure of a deadline to get things done? Do you have a hard time getting started on tasks? Do you get partway done with many tasks but have trouble completing them?

- **IMPULSIVE:** Do you do things without anticipating consequences (making decisions, shopping, driving, sex, drugs)? Do you blurt things out in conversation? Do you engage in risky sexual behavior? Do you make purchases without considering the cost or your budget?
- **NOVELTY SEEKING:** Are you often bored? Do you seek out new, stimulating experiences to avert boredom? Do you say yes to new obligations when you are already too busy?
- **DISTRACTIBLE:** Do sights, sounds, thoughts, or lower-priority activities distract you from what you should be doing? Do you find yourself daydreaming on a daily basis?
- **SCATTERED:** Are things messy in your personal space? Is there chaos on your desk, in your house, or in your car? Is it hard to stay on top of what you need to do, and when you need to do it?

#### Know how you function best

We like to ask people to tell us about moments of success, when their interests and actions are aligned and they feel like they're firing on all cylinders. These are periods we think of as full engagement, or what some psychologists call flow. For one individual, it was giving speeches in front of giant crowds; for another, it was chatting up clients.



Think about how you felt the last time you were doing something you truly love: You were in the moment, not criticizing yourself or worrying that you might be doing something wrong. You just did it. Hold that thought. We want you to briefly note at least three of these moments: Maybe they happen when you're running, or solving a tricky problem, or working with your hands, or teaching someone else what you know.

Then, dig into those experiences a bit to better understand what helped them work, what context got you firing on all cylinders. Consider, for example, how the event or situation was different from ones that were less successful. Did the context play to your strengths? Your interests? Did it minimize challenges? Were other people involved?

How did you make it happen? Do this with a few experiences, and look for patterns. What do you notice about how your interests, strengths, or challenges influence where you are successful?

#### Principles for thriving with FAST MINDS

It helps to know the factors that help you engage—the more of your life that has the characteristics you identified above, the better. Medication for ADHD can also help eliminate challenges. But it also takes personalized strategies to thrive with FAST MINDS. Here are some common principles that underlie those strategies:

- Emotional, negative thoughts and distracting environments can be minimized.
- Our brains engage best in interesting, meaningful tasks, with clear steps that can be held in mind.
- Many challenging functions can be outsourced to “peripheral brains” (alarm reminders, smartphones, planners, other people).
- The right habits at the right moment can keep one from falling off track with daily demands, impulsivity, and relationships.
- It takes the right environment—and accountability—to practice new strategies.

We have been honored to learn these principles from thousands of people that explored their own strengths and challenges with us—and thrived as they implement the strategies that are highest yield for them.

---

Craig Surman, MD, is a neuropsychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital and an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He is a member of CHADD's professional advisory board. Tim Bilkey, MD, is a psychiatrist in Ontario, Canada, who developed the original FAST MINDS program to help other physicians recognize, diagnose, and treat adult ADHD. The College of Family Physicians of Canada accredited this program in 2009. Karen Weintraub is a science journalist who has written extensively about neuroscience and conditions such

as autism, Alzheimer's, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and ADHD."

Adapted from *Fast Minds: How to Thrive If You Have ADHD (Or Think You Might)* by Craig Surman, MD, and Tim Bilkey, MD, with Karen Weintraub, by arrangement with Berkley, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. Copyright © 2013 by Harvard University.

This article originally appeared in the February 2013 issue of *Attention* magazine. Copyright © 2013 by Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD). All rights reserved. No portion of this article may be reproduced without written permission from CHADD.

## Related Articles

### Embracing Differences

Understanding and Meeting the Needs of Women with ADHD by Kari Dossett, LCSW RESEARCH SHOWS THAT ADHD IS CAUSED BY NEUROBIOLOGICAL FACTORS. This bra...

### Reorganizing and Renewing

PRESIDENT'S LETTER I LOVE FEBRUARY. I've had my new gardening seed catalogs for a month, placed lots of orders, and started som...

### Is There an App for That?

Social Skills for Young Adults with ADHD ASK THE EXPERT a chat with Michele Novotni, PhD "I ENJOY HELPING FOLKS WHO COLOR OUTSID..."

### Effects of Childhood ADHD on Adult Employment

RESEARCH BRIEFS Soleil Gregg, MA, interviews Jason Fletcher, PhD HOW DOES HAVING ADHD IN CHILDHOOD AFFECT INDIVIDUALS IN ADULTHOOD...

### LET'S Erase the Stigma

PROMISING PRACTICES by Mark Katz, PhD WHILE A NUMBER OF PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE WITH ADHD...



### Attention Magazine

- [Embracing Differences](#)
- [Thriving with FAST MINDS](#)
- [ADHD and the Decision to Medicate](#)
- [Building Competence through Chores](#)
- [Developing a Brain Filter](#)



#### ONLINE:

[Attention Digital Editions](#)

[Attention Magazine Archives](#)

[Advertise with CHADD](#)

\* *Attention* magazine is a benefit of CHADD membership

### Conferences & Training

Start Date	End Date	Name
01/01/2013 12:00 am	12/31/2014 11:30 pm	<a href="#">Parent To Parent On Demand</a>
05/10/2014 10:00 am	06/28/2014 12:00 pm	<a href="#">Parent to Parent Online Webinar with Jim Drey</a>
06/12/2014 11:30 am	06/14/2014 5:00 pm	<a href="#">Parent to Parent Teacher Certification Training UT 2014</a>

[View More Events >>](#)

### Donate to CHADD

CHADD's vision for the next 25 years is to increase its outreach and positive outcomes for the estimated 15 million Americans affected by ADHD. Donating online is a great way to show your support for CHADD!

[Donate Now](#)