

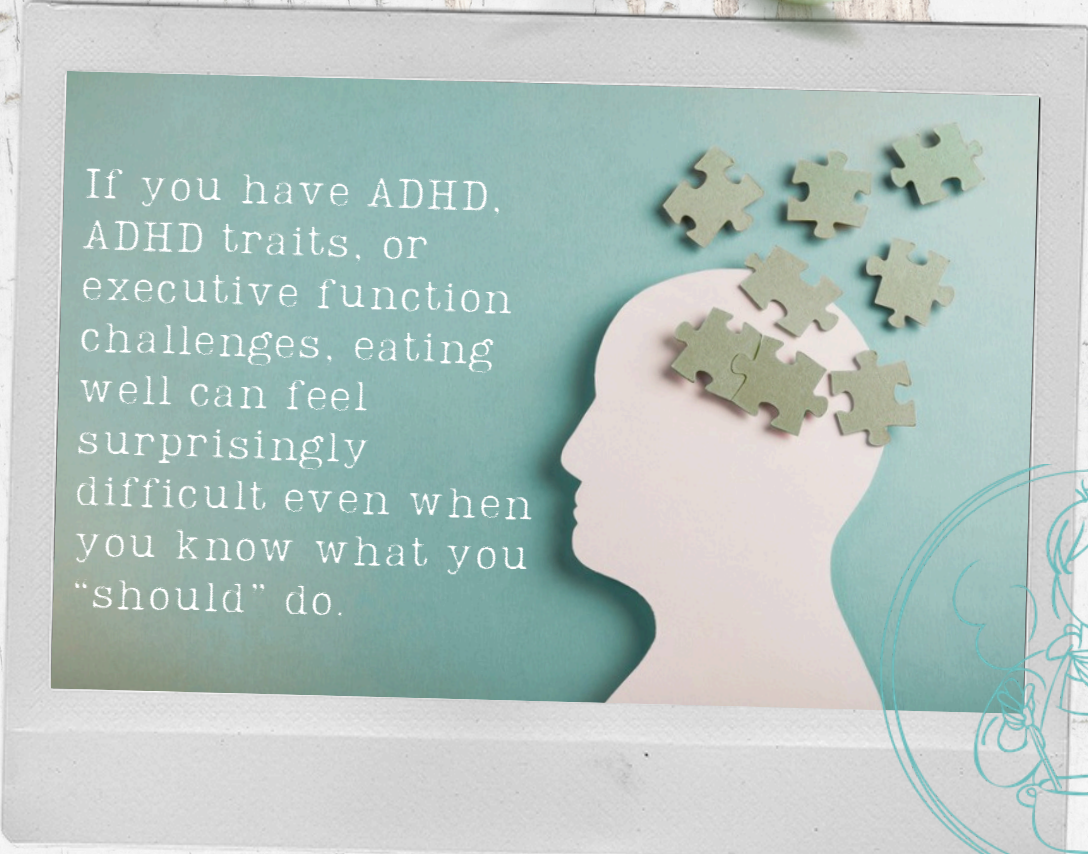


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ADHD & EATING

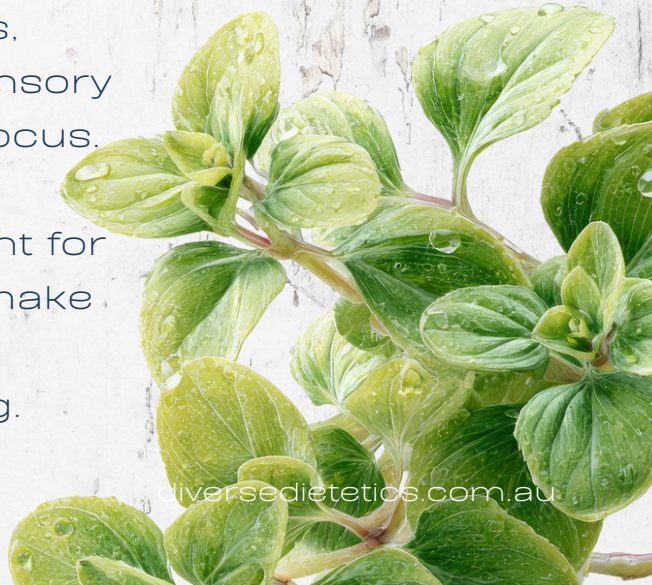
Why Food Can
Feel Harder Than
It “Should”



If you have ADHD,
ADHD traits, or
executive function
challenges, eating
well can feel
surprisingly
difficult even when
you know what you
“should” do.

This is not because you are lazy, undisciplined, or not trying hard enough. ADHD can affect the systems that make eating feel manageable: noticing hunger, planning ahead, starting tasks, managing impulses, regulating emotions, tolerating sensory input, and switching out of hyperfocus.

Nutrition support is not a treatment for ADHD on its own, but it can help make food feel more doable, more consistent, and less overwhelming.





How ADHD can affect eating

1. You may forget to eat until you are VERY hungry

Many adults with ADHD do not notice hunger early. You might get caught in work, parenting, errands, study, scrolling, driving, caring for others, or trying to get through the day.

By the time you realise you need food, you may feel shaky, irritable, exhausted, nauseous, headachy or desperate for something quick. At that point, your brain is not in its best decision-making mode.

This can lead to.....

- skipping breakfast or lunch
- long gaps between meals
- grazing later in the day
- eating very quickly
- feeling out of control around food at night
- relying on takeaway, snacks or sweet foods because they are fast and available

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2. Stimulant medication can change appetite patterns



Some ADHD medications reduce appetite during the day. This can make breakfast, lunch or daytime snacks feel unappealing, even when your body still needs fuel.

When medication wears off later, hunger can come back strongly. This can create a pattern of:

low intake during the day → intense evening hunger → overeating or constant snacking at night

This pattern is common and understandable. The aim is not to force large meals when appetite is low, but to find realistic ways to get enough nutrition across the day.

This might include small meals, drinkable options, protein snacks, or a “minimum viable lunch” that does not require much appetite or effort.

Medication questions should always be discussed with your GP, psychiatrist or pharmacist. A dietitian can help with the food timing and nutrition side.

3. Impulsivity and reward-seeking can affect food choices

ADHD can make immediate-reward foods feel extra appealing, especially when you are tired, overwhelmed, underfed or emotionally loaded.

Highly convenient foods such as takeaway, chocolate, chips, biscuits, soft drink, pastries or fast food are often easy, predictable, stimulating and low-effort. They can also provide a quick dopamine hit or a brief sense of relief.

The goal is not to ban these foods. Rigid rules often backfire, especially for people who already experience all-or-nothing thinking around food.

Instead, we look at ways to reduce the pressure on your brain by making nourishing options easier to access, while still allowing enjoyable foods to fit.

4. Executive function can make food planning feel impossible

Eating requires a lot of hidden steps:

- Notice hunger.
- Decide what to eat.
- Check what is in the house.
- Plan meals.
- Write a list.
- Go shopping.
- Put groceries away.
- Remember the food exists.
- Cook it before it goes off.
- Clean up afterwards.
- Repeat forever.



For an ADHD brain, this can be too many steps especially after a long day. This can lead to:

- an empty fridge
- buying groceries and not using them
- forgetting what meals you planned
- decision fatigue
- food waste
- spending more on takeaway
- feeling like you have "failed" again

A dietitian can help reduce the number of steps between "I need food" and "I have eaten something useful."

5. Sensory preferences can narrow food variety

Some people with ADHD have strong sensory preferences around texture, smell, temperature, flavour, appearance or food combinations.

You may go through phases of eating the same food repeatedly because it feels safe, easy or predictable. Then suddenly that food becomes intolerable and you are left with no backup option.

This can affect nutrition if the range of accepted foods becomes very small, but the answer is not to force foods that feel unsafe or overwhelming.

Instead, we can work with sensory-safe foods and gently build from there.

6. Stress, overwhelm and exhaustion can change eating patterns

ADHD often comes with high nervous system load. When life feels too loud, too busy or too much, food can become one of the few available ways to decompress, stimulate, soothe or switch off.

You may notice eating in response to:

- stress
- boredom
- frustration
- loneliness
- fatigue
- under-eating earlier in the day
- needing stimulation
- needing comfort
- finally getting a quiet moment

This does not mean food is the problem. It means food may be doing several jobs at once.

Dietetic support can help identify what is driving the pattern and build more support around it – without shame.





How ADHD can contribute to weight gain

ADHD does not automatically cause weight gain, and weight is influenced by many factors including genetics, hormones, medications, sleep, stress, health conditions, activity, food access, life stage and eating history.

However, ADHD can make weight management harder for some people because it can increase the likelihood of:

- skipped meals followed by intense hunger
- irregular eating patterns
- eating quickly before fullness catches up
- difficulty planning and shopping
- impulsive food purchases
- frequent takeaway because cooking feels too hard
- grazing while distracted
- relying on high-energy convenience foods
- reduced sleep, which can affect appetite and cravings
- difficulty maintaining routines long enough to see progress
- all-or-nothing dieting followed by rebound eating

This is why "just meal prep" or "just make better choices" is usually not enough.

The more helpful question is:

What food structure would make eating easier for this brain, in this life, with this level of capacity?



What a dietitian can help with

A dietitian can help turn nutrition advice into practical systems that fit your brain, appetite, preferences and routine.

This may include building a realistic **meal rhythm**

Not a perfect plan. Not a strict diet. Just enough structure to reduce long gaps, rebound hunger and decision fatigue.

Examples:

- a first-food option that works with your morning
- a realistic lunch that does not require cooking
- a late-afternoon “bridge snack” to prevent evening crash eating
- easy dinner defaults for low-capacity nights

Creating low-friction meals

Low-friction meals are meals that require fewer steps, less thinking and less clean-up.

Examples:

- supermarket roast chicken + microwave rice + bagged salad
- eggs on toast with avocado or spinach
- tuna, microwave rice cup and cucumber
- Greek yoghurt, fruit and muesli
- frozen dumplings with microwave veg
- baked beans on toast with cheese
- wraps with chicken, salad and hummus
- pre-made soup with toast and added protein
- The aim is to make the easy option more nourishing.





Reducing decision load

Many people with ADHD do better with defaults than with endless variety.

A dietitian can help you create:

- default breakfasts
- default lunches
- default snacks
- default freezer meals
- default takeaway choices
- a repeating grocery list
- backup meals for “nothing is going to plan” days

This reduces the number of food decisions you have to make from scratch.





Supporting appetite changes from medication

If ADHD medication affects your appetite, a dietitian can help you work around it with strategies such as:

- eating before medication where appropriate
- small, protein-containing options during low-appetite windows
- drinkable nutrition when chewing feels too hard
- planned evening meals that reduce rebound eating
- timing caffeine and meals in a way that supports your day

Any medication changes should be discussed with your prescribing doctor.

Improving nutrition without rigid rules

You do not need a perfect diet. Often, the first step is simply adding more support.

This might mean adding:

- protein to breakfast
- fibre-rich foods you actually tolerate
- more regular fluids
- a backup lunch
- a planned afternoon snack
- vegetables in easier forms
- more satisfying meals so you are not constantly searching for food later

At Diverse Dietetics, a useful framework is:

Protein, Plants & Purposeful Carbs

This means building meals around protein, practical plant foods, and carbohydrates that support energy, fibre, enjoyment, training needs and real life.

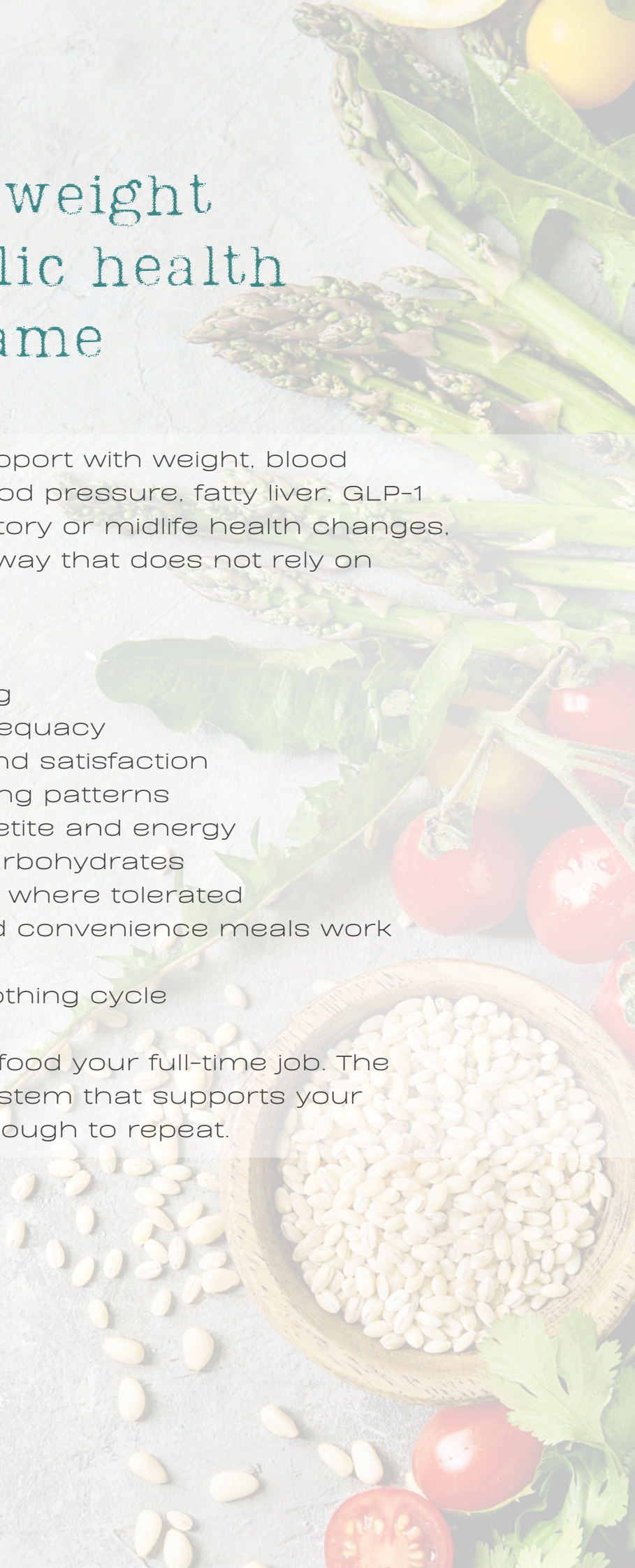
Supporting weight and metabolic health without shame

For clients who want support with weight, blood glucose, cholesterol, blood pressure, fatty liver, GLP-1 medication, bariatric history or midlife health changes, a dietitian can help in a way that does not rely on restriction or willpower.

This may involve:

- improving meal timing
- increasing protein adequacy
- supporting fullness and satisfaction
- reducing chaotic eating patterns
- planning around appetite and energy
- choosing practical carbohydrates
- improving fibre intake where tolerated
- making takeaway and convenience meals work better
- reducing the all-or-nothing cycle

The goal is not to make food your full-time job. The goal is to build a food system that supports your health and is realistic enough to repeat.



How Diverse Dietetics can help

Diverse Dietetics provides practical, personalised nutrition support for adults who need food advice that fits real life.

Together, we can look at:

- your current eating pattern
- ADHD-related food barriers
- appetite and medication timing
- work, family and daily routines
- sensory preferences
- food access and budget
- weight and metabolic health goals
- cooking capacity
- takeaway patterns
- low-capacity day strategies
- backup meals and default options

The aim is to create a flexible food structure that supports your health without adding more shame, pressure or unrealistic expectations



Clinical knowledge.
Practical food sense.
Human understanding.





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