

from the editors of

ADDITUDE

Getting Things Done with Adult ADHD

Stop wasting time, improve productivity, and stay focused with these get-it-done strategies.



ADDITUDE | Expert eBook

A trusted source of advice and information for families touched by attention-deficit disorder—
and a voice of inspiration to help people with ADHD find success at home, at school, and on the job.

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Introduction

Getting Things Done with Adult ADHD

Everyone is guilty of forgetting a dentist appointment or ignoring the bills for one day too many. These transgressions in disorganization typically provoke a little embarrassment, a late fee, and not much more. Not so for those of us with ADHD.

After a lifetime of missed deadlines and broken promises, we feel a stabbing pang of guilt and inadequacy with each unchecked to-do list item and each late arrival. “What’s wrong with me?” “Why can’t I get it together?” “I’m hopeless.” We are our own harshest critics—and this is especially true at those times when it feels like the rest of the world is humming along smoothly and we can barely make it out of bed. To us, getting things done is about more than syncing calendars—it’s about proving that ADHD does not rule our lives and that we are just as smart and capable as anyone else.

As you know, there is no correlation between ADHD and intelligence. You are not any less smart than the mom who shows up early to every soccer practice with team treats, or the colleague who hits deadlines like grand slams. Your brain works differently, that’s all. And so you need productivity strategies that make sense to you—not the rest of the world. This eBook provides just that: ADHD-tested time-management plans that don’t try to shove square pegs into round holes.

In this eBook, you will find calendar and to-do list recommendations vetted by the *ADDitude* editors and readers. You’ll find procrastination insights and fixes, focus tricks, and strategies to beating deadlines. You’ll find tips for getting to appointments on time, and the secret to breaking your Facebook addiction. But, more importantly, you’ll find a cleared pathway toward greater self-confidence and greater self-love.

CHAPTER 1

The ADHD-Executive Function Connection

Chapter 1: The ADHD-Executive Function Connection

Adults with ADHD struggle with more than just inattention or hyperactivity; they also often have deficits in their executive functions, or their ability to plan, organize, and carry out tasks.

The problems you have remembering appointments, planning complicated projects, or hitting deadlines are not personal, emotional, or even psychological. They are neurological. And though not totally outside your control, these problems can't be solved by "trying harder" or "applying yourself." That's just not how it works.

In other words, you are not lazy, apathetic, or selfish. You have ADHD. From hundreds of neuroimaging studies, we know that ADHD impacts specific areas of the brain. It causes structural and chemical idiosyncrasies in the prefrontal cortex, the front portion of the brain that is responsible for matching up internal goals with the thoughts and actions needed to achieve those goals.

The prefrontal cortex orchestrates important executive functions—the cognitive or mental abilities that people need to engage in goal-directed action. These executive functions include things like:

- Planning complex cognitive behaviors and tasks
- Making decisions
- Differentiating and choosing between conflicting priorities
- Anticipating the future consequences of current behavior
- Working toward a defined goal
- Suppressing short-term urges in the interest of long-term goals

These are all of the tools that people use to get things done. And your set of tools is too small, too unreliable, or totally broken—by no fault of your own.

“People with ADHD can only deal with things in the near term; the further out they are, the harder it is to think about and accomplish. A better name for ADHD would be Intention Deficit Disorder because people with ADHD can pay attention to the now just fine. They just can't pay attention to what lies ahead and the things they need to get done to have a better future. Those things are intentions.”

—RUSSELL A. BARKLEY, PH.D., AUTHOR OF [*Executive Functions: What They Are, How They Work, and Why They Evolved*](#)

CHAPTER 1 The ADHD-Executive Function Connection

“Executive function provides the mental abilities that we use to regulate our own behavior toward the future, to accomplish our goals, and to prepare for what is ahead,” says Russell A. Barkley, Ph.D. “This is the principal adaptation by which humans have survived and thrived on this planet.”

Barkley, author of 21 books on ADHD and executive functions, points to four specific brain connections originating from the prefrontal cortex that are impaired by ADHD. These connections, he says, explain why people with ADHD experience stunted executive functions.

1. The What Circuit: The first ADHD-impacted connection is from the frontal lobe back to the basal ganglia, in what is known as the “cool” executive circuit—often referred to as the “What” circuit. This “What” circuit powers our ability to use working memory to guide our own behavior. This is where we connect what we think with our plans, goals, and thoughts about the future.

2. The When Circuit: The second connection goes from the frontal lobe to the cerebellum, or the backmost part of your head—Barkley calls this the “When” circuit. This timing circuit coordinates our sequence of behavior, as well as how smooth and timely that behavior will be. Problems in the “When” circuit help explain “why ADHD causes such a problem with time management,” Barkley says.

3. The Why Circuit: The third circuit also originates from the frontal lobe, going through the central part of the brain (known as the anterior cingulate) to the amygdala—the emotional center of our brain. It’s often referred to as the “hot” circuit (or the “Why” circuit) because of its link to our emotions. Here, what we think controls how we feel, and those emotions reverberate back up to impact what we think about. “When thinking about multiple options, this circuit helps us decide based on motivational and emotional properties,” Barkley says.

4. The Who Circuit: This final circuit goes from the frontal lobe to the very back of the hemisphere. It’s where self-awareness takes place—it’s where we’re aware of what we do, how we feel (both internally and externally), and what’s happening to us.

EFD QUIZ

Think you might have an executive function disorder? Take our quiz at <http://additu.de/efd-signs>

CHAPTER 1 The ADHD-Executive Function Connection

“ADHD is known to involve these parts of the brain,” Barkley continues. “Having ADHD almost guarantees that you are going to have an executive function disorder.”

In short, executive function disorder impairs our self-control and self-regulation. It hinders our ability to visualize the future we want for ourselves, and change our behavior in hopes of achieving that ideal future state. It means we aren’t able to effectively forecast long-term goals, plan for them, or execute our plans efficiently.

Barkley lists seven specific executive functions impacted by ADHD:

1. Self-awareness, or self-directed attention
2. Inhibition and self-restraint, or the ability to manage your own behavior
3. Nonverbal working memory, or the ability to hold things in our mind “like a GPS that guides behavior over time”
4. Verbal working memory, or internal speech that directs behavior
5. Emotional self-regulation
6. Self-motivation, or compelling ourselves to do something when there are no consequences in the environment
7. Planning and problem solving, or “playing with information in our minds to come up with a new way of doing things”

These seven key executive functions don’t develop all at once. They build upon each other over the first 30 years of life in the brain’s frontal lobe. Meanwhile, the rest of the brain is growing and accumulating knowledge as well. The back part of the brain houses all of the information we learn. The front part of the brain houses these executive functions that help us act on that information. And ADHD straddles the two.

“ADHD is not a problem with knowing what to do; it is a problem with doing what you know—the performance part,” says Barkley. “If you focus on teaching skills to people with ADHD, you lose—it doesn’t work because it doesn’t help them use the knowledge they have. Instead, put more time into redesigning the environment to help them remember what they need to be doing at crucial parts of their day—points of performance where they

HOW ADHD TRIPS UP EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

Find out where your ADHD and executive functions overlap—and how you can get everything under control—at <http://additu.de/i5>

CHAPTER 1 The ADHD-Executive Function Connection

should be using their knowledge effectively. This means using prompts to remind them what they know and how to use it. It means re-engineering environments to facilitate doing what you know.”

In his work, Barkley uses the following prompts, tools, and strategies to kick-start his clients’ frontal lobes:

1. Make information external by using journals, Post-It notes, and wall calendars
2. Make time external by using clocks, timers, and reminders
3. Break up long-term projects into small daily steps to bridge the gap to the future
4. Devise external sources of motivation like peer pressure or rewards
5. Make problem-solving manual by “putting it in their hands, and making it as physical as possible”
6. Refill the self-regulatory fuel tank by using rewards, positive self-statements, and goal visualization—plus breaks for meditation and physical exercise

In this eBook, we will get more granular, providing very specific strategies and instructions for compiling visual to-do lists that feed into calendars with colors, priorities, and reminders. We will explain how to re-engineer your environment so that to-do lists don’t get physically or mentally lost. We will offer tricks and tips for filling in external reminders and motivations where none naturally exist. We will help you figure out where to sit, what to write down, and when to move your body in order to facilitate the most sustained attention. And we will help you see that knowing what to do is not enough; the trick is figuring out how to do what you know.

“The EF impairments that are characteristic of ADHD, particularly for smart people who don’t have behavior control problems, [sometimes] aren’t apparent until high school or later.”

—THOMAS BROWN, PH.D.

CHAPTER 2

Stop Wasting Time!

Chapter 2: Stop Wasting Time

How to get the most important stuff done on time, and stress less about the rest, by building and maintaining a prioritized to-do list

There's no way around it: adults with ADHD experience time differently. We don't see it as a linear progression from one moment to the next; we live and breathe in the present moment—and that's it! This helps when making a split-second decision or solving a short-term crisis, and it can definitely make life more interesting. But “interesting” isn't always more efficient, and this narrow view of time can cause day-to-day problems—especially when you're trying to prioritize and tackle a long to-do list.

“I've come up with a saying: ‘There's a strategy for that.’ And there always is. When I get stuck, I know there is another approach that will work.”

—HALEY, AN *ADDITUDE* READER

Speaking of which, a well-curated to-do list is arguably the most important and effective tool for managing time well. Not only is it a physical reminder of what needs doing—useful for those who struggle with working memory—it also sets your priorities and your deadlines for completing each one.

Most adults with ADHD (or at least those who seem to never have enough time) fall into two categories when it comes to to-do lists:

- They don't keep a to-do list at all, and hop from one task to another randomly.
- They write every single little thing they can think of down on their to-do list—then get so overwhelmed at the size of it that they don't get any of it done!

If either of these describes you, here are strategies for getting your to-do list under control, and learning how to use each hour more efficiently.

CHAPTER 2 Stop Wasting Time!

OPTION 1: The Perfectly Scheduled List

Judith Kolberg, professional organizer and author, outlines a simple 3-step plan for wrangling an out-of-control (or nonexistent) to-do list. **Warning:** This approach will take some time to establish, so set aside at least a few hours on a day you have no serious commitments. But don't worry—once you build the foundation and develop the skills to maintain this “system with a rhythm,” as Kolberg calls it, updating your to-do list will be a snap.

STEP 1. CREATE A MASTER LIST

Take your current to-do list—as well as any sticky notes, phone reminders, napkin scribbles, and anything else you've used to remind yourself of something over the past week—and start compiling them into a single list. Kolberg recommends using a word-processing document, like a Word or Google doc, but some adults with ADHD report that paper lists are easier to manage and keep track of. Still others prefer to keep their priorities in a mobile app like Todoist.

Think about your needs and your unique challenges: Do you lose spare papers frequently? Are you near a computer enough that a computer-based to-do list would be useful? Whether you choose a paper list or a computerized one, make sure it will be long enough, easily accessible, and have room to edit.

Once you've figured out where and how to set up your master list, start adding tasks. Each item should take no more than one step to complete—which often means breaking down larger goals. If one of your to-do list items is “get a new job,” for example, break that down into “update resume,” “research positions,” “write cover letters,” and “send applications.” Smaller single-step tasks are less daunting—meaning they're more likely to get done.

Once you've compiled this list, it will likely look impossible to finish. This is normal! You're not expected to do everything on this master list; its purpose is to give you a sense of what's on your plate and where your priorities lay.

To whittle it down to the essentials, divide the tasks into three groups: A (MUST get done), B (when I have the time), and C (fat chance!). If you're a visual learner, try using colors instead of letters to break up the tasks.

ADHD-APPROVED TO-DO LIST APPS

1. [Todoist](#)
2. [EpicWin](#)
3. [Due](#)
4. [Priority Matrix](#)

CHAPTER 2 Stop Wasting Time!

STEP 2. CALCULATE YOUR TIME

Writing out your master list is just the first step. You also have to figure out when you're going to complete all of these tasks. Did you know that scheduling a to-do list item into your calendar increases the chance that you'll complete it by about 70 percent? But in order to schedule tasks, you first need to figure out where you have extra time to accomplish them.

To do this, sit down with your calendar, your smartphone, and your daily planner, and enter all the time- and date-specific items you need to work around. This includes birthdays, weekly classes or practices, big deadlines at work, and doctors' appointments. Then, schedule in daily or weekly chores like grocery shopping, exercising, or paying bills.

Once both these steps are complete, you'll be able to see at a glance how much time you really have to tackle your to-do list.

STEP 3. PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

The final step is to combine your to-do list with your calendar. Adults with ADHD often suffer from “one-more-thing-itis”—meaning they always try to squeeze in *just one too many activities* into a day. With this in mind, always plan to do less than you think you'll be able to accomplish. Individuals with ADHD can't always trust their sense of time, and it's better to have some free time than to feel overwhelmed or unable to get anything done.

To properly combine your calendar with your to-do list, look at your A and B priorities. Estimate how many A-priority items you can fit (always scheduling more time than you think you'll need). Don't try to do them all right in a row—you'll become overwhelmed and less likely to complete later tasks, so be sure to allow yourself plenty of space between A-priority items. Once they're scheduled, turn to the B priorities. If you have any space left once those are all scheduled, turn to the C's—making sure you leave some wiggle room around everything.

LATER ON: MAINTAINING THE LIST

Voila! Your to-do list is scheduled and ready to be checked off. Once this initial set-up process is complete (and it looks daunting, we know), keeping your list updated is simply a matter of maintenance. When something occurs to you that you need to do, write a note in your phone or directly onto your master list. About once a week (schedule a time into your calendar

“The most important tip I ever got is to have one central family calendar, so that everyone in the family can remember important dates and events.”

—STU, AN *ADDITUDE* READER

CHAPTER 2 Stop Wasting Time!

to do this!), assign priority labels to the new items, and fit them into your calendar, just as before.

As time goes on, you'll most likely notice that many of the C-priorities get left undone. This is okay—great, even! Pruning non-essentials off your to-do list will make it more manageable, and you'll figure out where your energy is best spent.

DON'T FORGET!

Always include the following on your scheduled to-do list:

- **Some time outdoors.**

Green time is one of the best natural ADHD treatments.

- **Travel time to and from appointments.**

Again, err on the side of too much time here, and schedule about 20 percent more time than you think you'll need.

- **Time for meals.**

You'll accomplish more if you're properly fed and watered.

- **Some leeway.**

Life happens—your child may get sick, there may be traffic, or your heel might break on the way to work. If you give yourself some breathing room throughout your whole schedule, you'll be less stressed when things don't go exactly as planned.

BOOST YOUR BRAIN

Going outdoors isn't the only way to recharge. Find relaxing ways to use your free time at <http://additu.de/recharge>

Sample of a “Perfectly-Scheduled” To-Do List

We know this all seems daunting, so we’ve created an example of a “perfectly-scheduled” to-do list, complete with master list and schedule, broken down into 15-minute increments and enlarged to show detail.

Master List:

On this list, **yellow** indicates an “A” priority, **pink** is a “B” priority, and **teal** is a “C” priority.

Work

Personal

New tasks:

- Project A (3 steps)
- Send Project A to boss for feedback
- Edit Nina’s report
- Meet with Nina
- Research for Project B
- Project B (2 steps – Due Thursday @ 10 AM)
- Clean out desk!
- Meet with HR?
- Project C (2 steps)
- Project D (1 step)
- Help Jenn set up for Bob’s party
- Attend Bob’s party (Monday, 4:15 pm – 5:15 pm)
- Call with NY team (Monday, 2:15 pm – 3:15 pm)
- Call with LA team (Wednesday, 12:00 pm – 12:30 pm)
- Relabel/refile 2015 folders
- Annual performance review

Recurring tasks:

- Prepare for weekly staff meeting
- Make powerpoint
- Attend weekly staff meeting
- Update budget
- Fill out weekly paperwork
- Write weekly status report
- Office supplies:
 - Inventory
 - Order

New tasks:

- Appointment with Dr. Smith
- Call dentist?
- Do taxes
- Pick up prescription
- Coffee with Joe (Tuesday, 8:45 am)
- Get a birthday present for Charles
- Charles’ birthday lunch (Saturday, 11:30 am – 2:00 pm)
- Look up recipe for dinner!
- Dinner with Mom & Dad (Saturday, 5:00 pm – 7:30 pm)
- Marta’s soccer game (Thursday, 8:00 pm)

Recurring tasks:

- Grocery shopping
- Make lunches for the week
- Exercise (4 times per week)
- Update to-do list
- Go over to-do list
- Meditation
- Laundry
- Clean:
 - Kitchen
 - Bathroom
 - Living room
 - Bedroom

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
7:00 AM	WAKE UP	WAKE UP	WAKE UP	WAKE UP	WAKE UP	SLEEP IN!!	SLEEP IN!!
7:15 AM	EXERCISE	SHOWER	PREPARE FOR WEEKLY STAFF MEETING	EXERCISE	SHOWER		
7:30 AM		GET DRESSED & EAT BREAKFAST	COMMUTE		GET DRESSED & EAT BREAKFAST		
7:45 AM	SHOWER			SHOWER			
8:00 AM	GET DRESSED & EAT BREAKFAST	COMMUTE	GET DRESSED & EAT BREAKFAST	GET DRESSED & EAT BREAKFAST	FREE TIME		
8:15 AM	COMMUTE	COFFEE WITH JOE	COMMUTE	COMMUTE	COMMUTE	SHOWER	
8:30 AM						WAKE UP	
8:45 AM	ARRIVE @ WORK	ARRIVE @ WORK	ARRIVE @ WORK	ARRIVE @ WORK	ARRIVE @ WORK	GET DRESSED & EAT BREAKFAST	WAKE UP
9:00 AM	CHECK EMAIL	CHECK EMAIL	CHECK EMAIL	CHECK EMAIL	CHECK EMAIL	DRIVE DOWNTOWN	EXERCISE
9:15 AM	CHECK EMAIL	CHECK EMAIL	CHECK EMAIL	CHECK EMAIL	CHECK EMAIL		
9:30 AM	GO OVER TO-DO LIST FOR THE WEEK	MAKE POWERPOINT FOR WED. MEETING	INVENTORY OFFICE SUPPLIES	GO OVER PROJECT B, SEND TO BOSS BY 10 AM	RELABEL & REFILE 2015 FOLDERS		
9:45 AM	REREAD NOTES FOR PROJECT A	CLEAN UP DESK	WEEKLY STAFF MEETING	PROJECT C STEP 1		SHOP FOR BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR CHARLES	MAKE & EAT WAFFLES
10:00 AM	PROJECT A STEPS 1 & 2	MEETING W/ HR	GO OVER PROJECT A, SEND TO BOSS FOR NEXT STEPS	PROJECT C STEP 1	BREAK	WRAP PRESENT	DO DISHES
10:15 AM		PROJECT B STEP 1	MEETING W/ HR		PROJECT C STEP 1	ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW!	LEAVE MALL, WALK TO LUNCH
10:30 AM				PROJECT B STEP 1			
10:45 AM		PROJECT B STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1
11:00 AM		PROJECT A STEPS 1 & 2	MEETING W/ HR	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1
11:15 AM		PROJECT A STEPS 1 & 2	MEETING W/ HR	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1
11:30 AM		PROJECT A STEPS 1 & 2	MEETING W/ HR	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1
11:45 AM		PROJECT A STEPS 1 & 2	MEETING W/ HR	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1	PROJECT C STEP 1

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY			
12:00 PM	LUNCH	LUNCH	CALL W/ LA TEAM	LUNCH	FRIDAY LUNCH W/ WHOLE OFFICE	BIRTHDAY LUNCH FOR CHARLES @ HOLLYWOOD BISTRO 11:30 AM - 2 PM	FIRST LOAD OF LAUNDRY			
12:15 PM										
12:30 PM										
12:45 PM	PICK UP PRESCRIPTION	REGROUP & PLAN	LUNCH	REGROUP & PLAN			MAKE & EAT LUNCH			
1:00 PM								EDIT NINA'S REPORT		
1:15 PM	REGROUP & PLAN	PROJECT A STEP 3	REGROUP & PLAN	MEET W/ NINA TO DISCUSS	REGROUP & PLAN		FREE TIME			
1:30 PM	RESEARCH FOR PROJECT B									
1:45 PM									START NEXT STEPS OF PROJECT A	
2:00 PM	CALL WITH NY TEAM	PROJECT A STEP 4	FILL OUT WEEKLY PAPERWORK	GO FOR A WALK OUTSIDE	PROJECT D	FREE TIME	SECOND LOAD OF LAUNDRY			
2:15 PM										PLACE ORDER FOR OFFICE SUPPLIES
2:30 PM										
2:45 PM										
3:00 PM	BREAK	BREAK					PUT CLOTHES AWAY			
3:15 PM										
3:30 PM	CALL DENTIST!!									
3:45 PM	HELP JENN SET UP FOR PARTY	PROJECT B STEP 2	PREP FOR TOMORROW	PROJECT C STEP 2			FREE TIME			
4:00 PM								DRIVE TO DR'S APPOINTMENT		
4:15 PM	STAFF PARTY FOR BOB'S RETIREMENT	UPDATE BUDGET	APPOINTMENT W/ DR. SMITH @ 4:30		LOOK UP RECIPE FOR TOMORROW	MAKE DINNER FOR MOM & DAD				
4:30 PM										
4:45 PM										
5:00 PM	PREP FOR TOMORROW	PREP FOR TOMORROW		PREP FOR TOMORROW	WRITE TO-DO LIST & INPUT INTO PLANNER	MOM & DAD ARRIVE	MAKE & EAT DINNER			
5:15 PM									DINNER W/ MOM & DAD	

(Schedule Template to Print and Complete)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
7:00 AM							
7:15 AM							
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(Schedule Template to Print and Complete)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
1:00 PM							
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3:30 PM							
3:45 PM							
4:00 PM							
4:15 PM							
4:30 PM							
4:45 PM							
5:00 PM							
5:15 PM							
5:30 PM							
5:45 PM							
6:00 PM							
6:15 PM							
6:30 PM							
6:45 PM							

(Schedule Template to Print and Complete)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
7:00 PM							
7:15 PM							
7:30 PM							
7:45 PM							
8:00 PM							
8:15 PM							
8:30 PM							
8:45 PM							
9:00 PM							
9:15 PM							
9:30 PM							
9:45 PM							
10:00 PM							
10:15 PM							
10:30 PM							
10:45 PM							
11:00 PM							

CHAPTER 2 Stop Wasting Time!

OPTION 2: The Stubby To-Do List

If the above plan doesn't feel right for you—or you've tried it and struggled to maintain it—Kolberg has another strategy that she calls the “stubby” to-do list. This one is much shorter—and overall simpler—but requires daily maintenance. Try out both, and see which option works best for you.

MAKING A STUBBY TO-DO LIST

The stubby to-do list strategy is outlined by Kolberg in *ADD-Friendly Ways to Organize Your Life*, co-written with Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D. There, they describe the stubby to-do list as “bold and big and hard to ignore” and much shorter than the to-do list outlined in Option 1. To make a stubby to-do list, get brightly colored sticky notes or notepads—lined works best.

Each day, write 5 **MUST-DO-TODAY** items on a single sticky note, in the biggest writing you can fit. Start each item with an action verb to get you going: “**PAY** bills,” “**SEND** birthday card,” etc.

Choose one place to keep this list at all times: in your wallet, stuck to the back of your phone, or on your computer. Cross off items as you complete them, and each night transfer uncompleted items to tomorrow's list. Never have more than five items on your list. If you find that you're transferring more than 3 items regularly, your list is too long. Shorten it until you can complete every task every day, without transferring any to the next day.

MAXIMIZE EFFICIENCY

If this seems crazy to you—how can I limit my to-do list to just 5 items each day?—remember that on longer to-do lists (like Option 1), you need to assign priorities to each item, and low-priority items often get lost in the mix. The stubby to-do list forces you to re-evaluate what's most important each night to plan what you'll do the next day. Of course, the stubby to-do list won't encompass everything you'll do in one day—each day is comprised of more than five tasks! But if done correctly, it will help you identify patterns, group tasks together, and feel accomplished as you check things off each and every day.

APPS IN ACTION

Find our picks for the best time-management apps at <http://additu.de/10>

CHAPTER 2 Stop Wasting Time!

EXAMPLE STUBBY TO-DO LIST

A stubby to-do list might look like this:

- **BUY** *NEW TOOTHBRUSH*
- **RETURN** *LIBRARY BOOK*
- **PICK-UP** *DRY CLEANING*
- **CALL** *GRANDMA*
- **TALK** *TO BOSS ABOUT RAISE*

You can do all that in a day, right?

Figuring Out Priorities

No matter which to-do list option you choose, recognizing important tasks and setting your personal priorities is key. Setting priorities may seem easy in the abstract, but it actually requires deep introspection. Yes, you'll need to ask yourself logistical questions (when, where, and how you'll complete the task)—but you'll also need to consider much harder questions like:

- Is this really important?
- If I take on this task, will I have to give up something? Is that worth it?
- Am I living according to my own values, or following someone else's plan for my life?

Individuals with ADHD often have a habit of setting priorities based on what's easiest, what's quickest, or what someone else expects of them. These are all poor prioritization strategies and, in the end, can lead down a less desirable path.

So how do you figure out what's really important to you? Follow these steps to get started:

1. Take Time for Reflection

Schedule into your to-do list periodic blocks of time dedicated to thinking about what you want from your life and how you can achieve it. You don't need to write out concrete plans or set each day's priorities based on these long-term goals. But having them in the back of your mind—and

HOW I FOUND MY WINGS

Figuring out your path when you have ADHD isn't always easy. Read one man's success story at

<http://additu.de/wings>

CHAPTER 2 Stop Wasting Time!

revisiting them frequently—can help guide your day-to-day life in the right direction.

2. Eliminate Distractions Where Possible

The more information you take in, the more things you'll find to add to your to-do list. Simplify your life where possible. Install an ad-blocker on your computer so you're not bombarded with new things to buy, resolve not to check Facebook during the workday, or listen to a favorite CD instead of the radio on the way to work so you don't hear depressing news that could distract you. The fewer demands on your attention, the more streamlined your priorities will be; this is especially true for those with ADHD.

3. Focus On Neglected Priorities

As we grow older, certain things that we made time for when we were younger tend to fall by the wayside; common examples include friendships, healthy lifestyle habits, and leisure activities like reading or spending time outdoors. When you're thinking about your priorities, make sure you factor in these common trouble spots and other things that you tend to neglect. You'll be happy you did.

TROUBLE BLOCKING FACEBOOK?

Try SelfControl, a Mac application that blocks distracting websites for set periods of time. Visit selfcontrolapp.com

Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help

Perhaps the most critical step to getting a to-do list under control is accepting that you can't do everything alone, and—more importantly—recognizing where you need help. Delegation is a critical skill for your career, your family life, and your happiness.

Delegation doesn't come naturally to many people with ADHD for two main reasons. First, self-esteem issues may make us hesitate to ask for help because we feel we “don't deserve it.” This isn't true, of course, but it can exacerbate the second reason we tend to avoid asking for help: We're not sure how to outline a task in clear, simple terms for another person. Afraid of looking foolish, we may instead say, “Forget it—I'll do it all myself!”

The solution to both of these problems is the same: Take time to consider why you need help and how you can best teach another person to complete the task. Take notes, asking yourself:

- What needs to be done?

CHAPTER 2 Stop Wasting Time!

- Where should someone start, and what is the most logical path to follow through the task?
- What parts will be the most difficult, and how might someone overcome them?
- Who else needs to be involved?
- How much time should this task take?

Once you've answered all these questions, jot down a simple diagram or mind map of the task. Present it to the person you're asking for help, and ask them if it makes sense. Be open to honest feedback, and work with the person on finding the best way to complete a task. If you still struggle with feelings of not “deserving” the help, offer your assistance in another area where you excel. The person may not accept, but you've at least offered a fair exchange.

Emotional Support Helps, Too

Getting help isn't all about delegating tasks. One of the most powerful things someone can offer you isn't help with the laundry—it's listening to your problems, offering an emotional outlet, and helping you work through difficulties. If you're having trouble sorting out your priorities, for example, a trusted friend can help you assess what's really important and what will help you achieve your goals. If you're struggling to manage an overflowing to-do list, your spouse can look it over and see patterns you might have missed or opportunities to group tasks together. No matter the burden, sharing it with others can help you manage it—and solidify your relationships in the process.

THE NEVER TO-DO LIST

If your productivity is lagging, chances are you're guilty of one (or more) of these 9 productivity-sucking habits. What not to do:

1. Avoid important (but painful) tasks
2. Accept nothing less than perfection
3. Devote all your time and attention to the details
4. Put off defining your long-term goals
5. Try to do everything
6. Respond to all emails (or texts, or calls)
7. Work straight through without any breaks
8. Try to please everyone

ADHD Time Assessment Chart

Dr. Ned Hallowell developed a chart that indicates whether various tasks are really worth your time and effort. This ADHD time-management chart weighs tasks against the effort they take, the fulfillment they give, and their necessity.

CRAZY BUSY TIME CHART

I. Activity	II. Average Hours per Day	III. Effort Factor (1 = most, 5 = least)	IV. Fulfillment Factor (1 = least, 5 = most)	V. E x F (column III x column IV)	VI. Necessity, Right-Thing-to- Do Factor (1 = least, 5 = most)	VII. Worth-It Factor (product of columns III, IV, and VI)
PERSONAL CARE						
Sleep						
Eating						
Bathroom						
Shower						
PERSONAL CARE (TOTAL HOURS)						
HOUSEHOLD						
Housework						
Food (prep and cleanup)						
Laundry						
Lawn and other outdoor work						
Purchasing goods and services (food, car maintenance, etc.)						
Professional services (doctor, haircutter, etc.)						
Caring for/helping household members						
Caring for/helping non- household members						
HOUSEHOLD (TOTAL HOURS)						

Excerpted from *CrazyBusy: Overstretched, Overbooked, and About to Snap! Strategies for Coping in a World Gone ADD*.
© 2006 by Edward M. Hallowell, M.D., Ballantine Books, a division of Random House, Inc., N.Y

CRAZY BUSY TIME CHART

I. Activity	II. Average Hours per Day	III. Effort Factor (1 = most, 5 = least)	IV. Fulfillment Factor (1 = least, 5 = most)	V. E x F (column III x column IV)	VI. Necessity, Right-Thing-to- Do Factor (1 = least, 5 = most)	VII. Worth-It Factor (product of columns III, IV, and VI)
WORK AND WORK-RELATED ACTIVITIES						
The part of work you like best						
The part of work you like least						
The part of work that's in-between						
WORK AND WORK-RELATED ACTIVITIES (TOTAL HOURS)						
DRIVING, COMMUTING, TAXING (TOTAL HOURS)						
EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES (TOTAL HOURS)						
ORGANIZATION, CIVIC, AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES (VOLUNTEER, UNPAID)						
Organization						
Civic						
Religious						
ORGANIZATION, CIVIC, AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES (VOLUNTEER, UNPAID) (TOTAL HOURS)						
LEISURE (TOTAL HOURS)						
SOCIALIZING						
With people you like a lot						
With people you don't much like						
With people in between						
Playing a sport						
Other exercise						
SOCIALIZING (TOTAL HOURS)						

CRAZY BUSY TIME CHART

I. Activity	II. Average Hours per Day	III. Effort Factor (1 = most, 5 = least)	IV. Fulfillment Factor (1 = least, 5 = most)	V. E x F (column III x column IV)	VI. Necessity, Right-Thing-to- Do Factor (1 = least, 5 = most)	VII. Worth-It Factor (product of columns III, IV, and VI)
ELECTRONIC TIME						
E-mail (necessary)						
E-mail (screen sucking)						
Internet (necessary)						
Internet (screen sucking)						
Television (necessary)						
Television (screen sucking)						
Telephone (landline)						
Cell Phone						
Smart Phone (necessary)						
Smart Phone (screen-sucking)						
ELECTRONIC TIME (TOTAL HOURS)						
INTIMATE TIME (LOVEMAKING, CUDDLING, INTIMATE CONVERSATION) (TOTAL HOURS)						
WASTED, KILLED, OR FORGOTTEN TIME (TOTAL HOURS)						
CREATIVE TIME (TOTAL HOURS)						
OTHER (DESCRIBE) (TOTAL HOURS)						

CHAPTER 3

Stay on Schedule

Chapter 3: Stay on Schedule

How to devise the most ADHD-friendly scheduling system by pairing a paper planner with digital tools

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Before you can begin to cross off to-do-list items, you first need a prioritized, big-picture schedule that ensures you're working on the right things at the right time. Where should you maintain this schedule—and how can you make sure you actually stay on top of it? The best system for many people with ADHD is a well-maintained and formatted paper planner used *in conjunction* with digital tools.

Long Live Paper!

In this technology-driven age, many people are using solely digital planners, and throwing their old-fashioned paper planners in the bin. Don't! For many distraction-prone people with ADHD, paper planners—*combined with* the right digital tools—are the best way to organize your time and make sure you stick to your schedule.

Why paper? Adults with ADHD are often categorized as visual or kinesthetic learners—they learn either by seeing, by doing, or both. Paper planners combine both these styles in the most effective way—they serve as a physical prompt to visually remind you of your tasks, and the act of writing down each item reinforces it kinesthetically in your mind. Digital planners can be great, but since they're not physical objects, they can be less useful to someone with a visual learning style. Plus, they can be easier to forget or ignore, hidden amongst all those other apps, emails, and photos on your phone.

On top of that, while technology has come a long way, it's not infallible. Google might go down for an hour, or your to-do list app might crash and need to be reinstalled. A paper planner ensures you never find yourself completely empty-handed when it comes to figuring out your next priority.

“Relying solely on a PDA to remind me where I'm supposed to be, and what I'm supposed to be doing, has never worked for me,” says Jack Pera, who was diagnosed with ADHD a year after getting married. “The gad-

HOW I THINK

Visual? Auditory? Kinesthetic? Learn more about various learning styles at <http://additu.de/style>

CHAPTER 3 Stay on Schedule

get hides too much, and I have to remember to go looking for it—not the greatest starting point for people with ADHD.

“Around the time I was diagnosed, I started using a FranklinCovey paper planner, and printed out pages from Outlook that fit into it. The paper planner was more visible than a PDA—it sat on a raised platform on my desk—so it was very helpful. It became my oracle.”

Digital tools have their advantages too, which we’ll discuss later on. For this reason, we recommend you use *both* a paper planner and supplementary digital tools, at least if you’re just starting out. You’ll get the best of both worlds, and learn more about your own time-management style. If, after a while, you find you prefer one or the other and can use it effectively, great!

Picking Your Perfect Planner

When it comes to paper planners, there are hundreds of options—and the choice can be overwhelming for anyone. Here are a few criteria and options to consider when choosing a paper planner:

- **Monthly calendars** are useful for seeing large chunks of time at a single glance and, thanks to their size, are generally harder to lose. The big drawback is that these monthly planners only allow enough room for a few items per day. This is not the place to cram in all your priorities, especially if you lean toward a more complex to-do list. Plus, their general lack of portability means you can’t schedule things as they come up. We recommend keeping a large monthly calendar in your kitchen or mudroom to track events, appointments, and vacations that impact multiple family members.
- **Daily planners** break each day down into small increments—usually 15 or 30 minutes. Abigail Levrini, Ph.D., and Frances Prevatt, Ph.D., coauthors of *Succeeding with Adult ADHD*, recommend that “planner newbies” start with this type of planner—they work particularly well in concert with To-Do List Option 1, outlined in the previous chapter. But Levrini and Prevatt warn that the “micromanaging” aspect of a 15-minute daily planner may be overwhelming for some, especially if you’re prone to anxiety.
- **Weekly planners** usually spread seven days across two facing pages, and combine the pros and cons of both monthly and daily planners.

“I use a good, old month-at-a-glance calendar. It sits on the kitchen counter where everyone can see. Everyone’s appointments and activities are listed so we can all see what’s going on each day, as well as getting an idea of how the month is going to flow.”

—MUFFY, AN ADDITUDE READER

CHAPTER 3 Stay on Schedule

They can help you see your schedule as a whole, without getting bogged down in minute tasks—but they can force you to leave out items or stop you from properly calculating your time.

Ultimately, the right planner for your unique scheduling habits and needs is best decided by you, and you alone. Consistency is key—once you find the right planner, as long as you use it regularly and sync it frequently with your to-do list, you're bound to see results.

Readers Review the Planner Pad

The Planner Pad (plannerpads.com) is a planner system that promises to organize you in six months—or your money back! Three *ADDitude* readers tested it out for themselves; here's what they had to say.

Reviewer: David, computer programmer, Anderson, South Carolina

My biggest time-management challenge is prioritizing. If I enter all the things I need to do on to one list, my brain freezes, and I can't decide what to do first.

How the Planner Pad helped: Seeing at a glance what I have to do and what I've done was helpful, since I feel incompetent at planning and executing tasks. The Planner Pad gives me a weekly focus, instead of a myopic daily focus. Also, I hate copying undone items from one day's to-do list to the next, and the Planner Pad was like receiving forgiveness. If I didn't get something done on Tuesday, I could do it on Wednesday or Thursday, as my schedule allowed.

Will I continue to use it? Despite years of trying, I can't enter data into a phone as fast as I can write it. But I also want a planning system that gives automatic reminders. So I'll use this, along with some electronic tools.

OUR FAVORITE PAPER PLANNERS:

1. The Planner Pad
2. Moleskine Collection
3. FranklinCovey Day Planners

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Reviewer: Kris, ADHD coach, llama rancher, and fiber artist, Livermore, Colorado

My biggest time-management challenge is remembering everything I have to do, and where I go to do it. I joke that I need a 36-hour day.

How the Planner Pad helped: I did my best to write in all of my to-dos, chores, and so on, but, on some days, there wasn't enough space to accommodate everything. That's when arrows, lines, and colors came into play. While the idea behind the system is great, my schedule doesn't lend itself to assigning times for to-dos.

Will I continue to use it? The planner would work better for someone with a less fractured life. As it happens, my husband, who doesn't have ADHD, fell in love with the Planner Pad and has taken it for his own!

Reviewer: Stacy, cafeteria manager, Matthews, North Carolina

My biggest time-management challenge is getting organized. I make a lot of lists, but then forget to bring them with me or forget where I put them. I waste too much time looking for stray notes and lists, or re-writing things I've already written down.

How the Planner Pad helped: I read the instructions carefully, and felt like I'd been given an easy-to-follow, detailed way to get organized! It was great. I used the planner for appointments, to-do and grocery lists, work priorities, and personal projects, so I knew exactly where to look for everything. Filling out my "Major Goal This Week" at the top of each right-hand page helped me stay focused.

Will I continue to use it? Yes! It is amazing how motivated I feel if I can prioritize what needs to get done. I've already made Planner Pad part of my daily routine.

ADDITUDE-TESTED PRODUCTS

Read more ADHD product reviews at <http://additu.de/gadgets>

CHAPTER 3 Stay on Schedule

Planner In Your Pocket

Digital tools crush paper planners in their ability to remind you of upcoming events automatically, sync across calendars, and make scheduling recurring weekly appointments a snap. Plus, most of us are used to our phones following us wherever we go—meaning they're easily accessible whenever a new to-do list item pops into your head. And at this point most of us are comfortable with Google Calendar, Outlook, or other digital scheduling tools.

The truth that no one talks about, however, is that no one's phone is the all-in-one tool they always dreamt it would be. We lose to-do list items in the recesses of the notes app, or fail to ever assign items a priority or schedule a due date—so even if you're fairly diligent about jotting down upcoming tasks in your phone, most of them just sit in the cloud, eternally undone.

Luckily, there are tons of ADHD-friendly online tools designed to make the process of capturing tasks and scheduling them in your paper planner easier—and more likely to get done.

Here is a short list of mobile calendar and to-do list tools we love:

- [Google Keep](#) (iOS and Android; free)
As a Google tool, Google Keep has gotten surprisingly little fanfare—which is a shame, because its bright colors and shockingly easy-to-use interface make it a perfect tool for any adult with ADHD. Google Keep is essentially a note-capturing tool; if you think of an item you want to transfer to your master to-do list, jot it into Google Keep—in word, video, or photo form. You can even record yourself speaking, and the app will convert your words to text as soon as you're finished. On top of that, the app is fast—just start typing or recording, and categorize it later. The app syncs automatically to your Google Drive account, meaning you can look at the notes on any device—even if you space out and leave your phone at home.
- [Due](#) (iOS, \$4.99)
Due is another great app to capture to-do list items. It stores tasks, assigns due dates, and lets you see at a glance which items are coming up. Plus, its reminder tools can't be beat: if you ignore a reminder (a common problem for distractible people with ADHD), it will stay in sight until you complete the task or reschedule it. It's iOS only, but it easily syncs across all Apple devices—including your iPad or Mac computer.

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- **Nag** (iOS; Free)
Nag is the most persistent alarm clock around, reminding you over and over to complete a task until you suck it up and finish it. With just a few clicks, you can set recurring reminders for upcoming appointments using 2-, 5-, 10-, 30-, and 60-minute intervals. Then, you can finish the task once it comes up, or easily program the app to remind you again.
- **2Do** (iOS, Mac, and Android; Free-\$49.99)
The 2Do app can be used to manage simple reminders, checklists, as well as larger projects. Plus, the “Quick Add” option can be used as a place to dump your ideas before you forget them. It lets you organize tasks by color—an important feature for the visually oriented. Each task is sortable by priority, due date, note, embedded audio note, and/or photo. The app also lets you defer tasks to a later date.
- **Evernote** (iOS, Android, Windows, and Mac; free for basic version)
Evernote allows you to store text, photos, and audio notes on your device of choice, eliminating the need for paper clutter. Create “note-books” and categorize notes for recipes, an upcoming vacation, product research, to-do lists, and so on. Notes are tagged with geo-location for mapping or search. All your information is in one location, organized, and available through a simple search.
- **Priority Matrix** (iOS, Android free for basic version)
Priority Matrix is a powerful, yet easy-to-use task-management tool that’s ideal for anyone who needs to see their tasks. Sort tasks into one of four quadrants: Critical and Immediate, Critical but not Immediate, Not Critical but Immediate, and Uncategorized. Manipulate the size/ colors of each section, add icons, and select the percentage completed. You can indicate due dates, start dates, and repeat dates with push notifications.

EXPERT ANSWERS

ADDitude’s top ADHD experts answer readers’ questions about living with ADHD at <http://additu.de/advisors>

CHAPTER 3 Stay on Schedule

Working in Harmony

You have your paper planner, and you have your smartphone. How do you get them to work together without just duplicating efforts? The key is to not make them exact replicas of each other; each tool has its own strengths and weaknesses, and your planning system should take those unique pros and cons into account. Here are some “best practices” to help this two-part system work for you.

1. Come up with specific “rules” for each tool.

If you create specific guidelines for how you use your paper planner and your smartphone in concert, you’ll benefit from each tool’s unique strengths—without entering every little item in two distinct places.

If you need help getting started, try these: Use your **smartphone** for appointment reminders, your master to-do list, and contact information. Use your **planner** for daily and monthly schedules, assigning priorities, and breaking down bigger projects into smaller steps. Your specific system might be a little different; try out some rules and see what feels most effective.

2. Pick a designated spot for your paper planner, and keep it there at all times.

If you’re an adult with ADHD, chances are you’ve misplaced more than one planner. As a result, you have about four floating around your house—each filled with important appointments, daily reminders, and long-term goals that are being ignored.

The simple solution? Assign your planner to one spot, and make sure it stays there as much as possible. Easier said than done, right? The key to success here is ultra-specificity. Don’t just tell yourself, “I’ll keep my planner in my briefcase.” Get *specific*—say instead, “I’ll keep my planner in the front pocket of my briefcase, in front of every other item in that pocket.” Instead of keeping your planner “On my desk,” resolve to keep it specifically “On my desk, in the top left-hand corner, directly to the left of my phone.” Then, when you notice your paper planner isn’t in exactly the right spot, get in the habit of moving it back. You’ll start to notice when it’s out of place, even just a little—making you far less likely to lose track of it.

ADHD NEWSLETTERS

Stay up-to-date on the latest in ADHD news, tips, and support with *ADDitude*’s free newsletters. Sign up at <http://additu.de/newsletters>

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3. Pick one place to jot down items as they come up.

Your “master list” of tasks should be easily accessible at a glance, ready to be scheduled into your planner. This may be one area where digital is best: If you carry your phone with you at all times, use it to capture reminders and appointments on the fly. You can also use an app for this purpose: **Todoist**, **Remember the Milk**, and **Due** are some of our favorites. You’ll need to transfer these to your paper planner later, which may be a good thing if the extra step of writing it out will help you remember to prioritize a task.

4. Schedule a specific, consistent time every day for looking at and updating your planner.

Even if you’ve gotten in the habit of putting your planner in its designated place and inputting tasks into your digital master list, it will all be useless if you forget to transfer appointments and deadlines from your to-do list to your planner.

To build a habit of checking and updating your planner consistently, start by setting a daily reminder on your phone. The exact time of day doesn’t matter as much as the consistency. Maybe you like to look at your planner right when you wake up, to plan your best day. Maybe you prefer to look at it as you wind down each night, at the time when your brain is most relaxed and less likely to panic about unforeseen tasks. No matter the time of day, make sure you dedicate at least 5 to 10 minutes to inputting upcoming tasks and reviewing what you have coming up. Soon, it will become a habit—and you’ll be able to turn off that pesky phone reminder!

5. Don’t rely on your memory.

Many adults with ADHD think, “As long as I write ‘Doctor’s appointment’ in my planner on the correct day, I’ll know what that means.” Then, the date rolls around, and they’ve forgotten which doctor, how much their co-pay will be, and the time of the appointment! Remember this rule: When in doubt, write it out. Worst-case scenario: You’ve wasted a couple of seconds writing too much information.

6. Input all actual appointments into your phone, as well as your paper planner.

Your phone has a reminder function for a reason. When it comes to time-specific appointments, your best bet is to input each one into your

I FORGET

Learn more about how ADHD impairs working memory at <http://additude/3u>

CHAPTER 3 Stay on Schedule

planner and your phone and set a series of reminders before they happen. Try setting reminders 24 hours before, 1 hour before, and 15 minutes before the start time to prepare yourself. You can use Google Calendar, a to-do list app like Due, or your phone's basic reminder function for this.

7. Backup important info.

If you've ever broken or lost your phone, you know it's a good idea to write down 5-10 of your most important phone numbers in your planner. On the flip side, we also recommend setting reminders for all major appointments in your phone. This way, if you lose one or the other, you can piece together the rest without having a schedule meltdown.

8. Personalize!

Brightly colored markers, stickers, or post-it notes can be strong visual cues to help jog your memory as you look through your paper planner. Color-coding tasks by category, for example, can help you see at a glance how much housework or exercise you have planned for the day, week, or month. Be sure you use the same color scheme in your digital tools, too; it's a great way to bridge the gap between platforms, and make sure your two tools stay in-sync with each other.

EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION

Read how an entrepreneur and mom with ADHD juggles a family, a herd of pets, and two small businesses at <http://additu.de/exec-dys>

Readers Share Their Stories

“I use the calendar on my phone to jot down things as they come up and transfer it to my wall calendar at home. Then, I message my child each night with the next day’s schedule (mine and his separately) so that he knows what to expect and can refer back to it throughout his day if needed.”—CARLA

“At this point, I keep an Outlook calendar with work, school and personal appointments and a written weekly planner with additional info—and it’s up to me to keep everyone in my family organized. Things are going to get crazy in the fall however, because in addition to working, I am going back to school and will need to figure out a system to track my assignments in addition to everything else!”—RACHELLE

“We have a ‘Grand Central’ kitchen wall calendar, which I try to keep current. But my hubs and I need to tag team a lot so we make sure we always keep our e-calendars in sync. We email each other invites from work when something changes so we also have visibility on our work calendars.”—SHERYL

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“I keep an updated calendar on my computer that I can email to the older kids and hubby. Plus, I print a hard copy and post it to the fridge. Everyone knows where to look if there are any questions!” —JENNIFER

“I like to use my phone as a back-up, but I have a good old-fashioned calendar in my hallway upstairs and a calendar whiteboard on my fridge that I prefer to rely on.” —HEATHER

“I use Outlook to stay organized. This allows me to always have the calendar handy on my phone, which is great for scheduling appointments and other activities or looking up what’s coming up on the fly. I also have a magnetic organizer on my refrigerator with plastic pockets that fit a sheet of paper. I print out the month’s calendar and put it in the second pocket. Every Sunday I print out a weekly calendar and that goes in the front pocket.” —KELLY

CHAPTER 4

**Get Started.
Stay Focused.**

Chapter 4: Get Started. Stay Focused.

How to approach and break up overwhelming tasks so they get done without anguish

“People with ADHD aren’t good at ordination—planning and doing parts of a task in order,” says William Dodson, M.D., an ADHD expert. “Tasks in the neurotypical world have a beginning, a middle, and an end. People with ADHD don’t know where and how to start, since they can’t find the beginning. They jump into the middle of a task and work in all directions at once. Organization becomes an unsustainable task because organizational systems work on linearity, importance, and time.”

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Weak executive function skills—or ordination—make it particularly tough for anyone with ADHD to start and finish projects in a timely manner. Maybe you feel overwhelmed by the scope and size of the project, unsure how to best start. Maybe you lose interest halfway through or get distracted by a more interesting demand. Maybe you feel ashamed about past mistakes, and avoid finishing tasks or taking on new ones as a result.

Whatever the reason, it’s important to remember that your past mistakes do not define you, and you can move forward—productively. How? To start, follow these ADHD-friendly strategies for overcoming the obstacles that keep you from getting started.

Understand Your Brain

Neurotypical adults say they can generally stay focused on a task for an hour or more at a time. The average for adults with ADHD is 10 to 15 minutes—and it may be even less for you. Paul Hammerness, M.D., and Margaret Moore, authors of *Organize Your Mind, Organize Your Life*, say the key to building proper motivation is recognizing that your attention is a finite resource.

“The act of paying attention is not always an automatic process,” they write—particularly for those with ADHD. “Without our concerted efforts to do so, events, information, and experiences can pass us by. It’s intriguing

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to think that ‘I can’t remember’ may really mean ‘I wasn’t paying attention in the first place.’”

In other words, cut yourself a little slack! Recognize that your attention span is not unlimited, and plan your tasks accordingly, spreading them across several days if you can. If you absolutely must get a project done in one burst, schedule periodic breaks to move around, get a snack, or do something else that you enjoy. You’ll avoid burning out and abandoning the project halfway through—just be sure to set a timer so you don’t get sidetracked.

Remind Yourself of the Task

Does the phrase, “I forgot to remember” hit close to home? Adults with ADHD often complain that, even with schedules and to-do lists, they simply forget what tasks they’re supposed to do next. Your to-do list and schedule are great tools—you should use them as much as possible!—but if they don’t feel like enough, you may need additional reminder systems.

Ari Tuckman, Psy.D., author of *More Attention, Less Deficit: Success Strategies for Adults with ADHD*, says that when it comes to reminders, the key to success is timing. “You need to remind yourself to do a task at a time and place where you can complete it,” he says. “To turn ‘I forgot’ into ‘I did it already,’” he recommends following these rules:

- **Place an item where you can’t forget it.**

Location is everything—if your task involves a physical object, place that object somewhere where it can serve as its own reminder. If you need to mail a bill, for instance, tape it to your front door the night before. You’ll be able to grab it on your way out and hold it in your hand all the way to the mailbox on the corner.

- **Use technology.**

Call your home voicemail (if you still have one!), email your work account, or set location-based reminders on your phone. No matter how you use it, technology can remind you to act on something where and when you need to do it—making it more likely to get done.

- **Go old-school, too.**

Sometimes, a phone reminder when you get home isn’t quite enough—you see it when you go through the door, but by the time you change out of your work clothes, you’ve forgotten. In these cases, place post-its or

REMEMBER THE MILK!

If you forget items or tasks easily, read up on more working memory tips at <http://additu.de/mem>

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other bright notes in specific locations—like the cabinet that needs to be fixed, or the litter box that needs to be cleaned. When you see the post-it later, you'll be reminded to act on the task.

- **Tie a (metaphorical) string around your finger.**

Adults with ADHD have unique brains, so they often need a reminder system that's entirely unique. Dr. Tuckman recommends placing an unusual, goofy, or out-of-place item somewhere where you'll see it later. "The item shouldn't have a relationship to the task," he says. For example: "Turn a chair upside down to remind you to go the bank."

Getting Started

Even if you remember the task, you might still feel like you're physically or psychologically unable to get started. This is a common (and frustrating) problem for many adults with ADHD. Chances are, it leads to nagging from spouses or bosses, or someone else jumping in and doing the task themselves—leaving you feeling angry or embarrassed. If getting started is your problem, try a few of these strategies from Dr. Tuckman:

- 1. Set up the task.**

You're more likely to start something if you have everything you need to get it done. Create momentum and break down barriers by gathering everything you'll need beforehand, without actually pressuring yourself to start the task just yet. If you're painting the bathroom, for example, schedule a time to go buy paint, brushes, and tape, and leave them outside the bathroom door. Then, when you schedule a time to actually paint the bathroom, you're ready to go.

- 2. Schedule similar tasks together.**

"Cluster" your tasks together so you do related ones at the same time. This will help you make the most of being on a roll, and will decrease the mental effort it takes to "shift gears." If you have to make a grocery list and write thank-you cards, for instance, do them in a row—the transition from writing one thing to another will be easier than shifting from writing to cleaning, and will help you cross off several items at once.

- 3. Reward yourself.**

If there isn't a natural reward for completing a task, you may have a difficult time motivating yourself to get it done. In these situations, it's a good

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idea to create your own reward to stop yourself from getting bored. If you hate doing the laundry each week, decide to reward yourself with an ice cream outing once it's complete. Remember, it's important to be honest here, even if it's only with yourself—if you allow yourself to get the reward without completing the task, you won't be motivated to follow through.

5. Use energy bursts wisely.

If you wake up charged up and ready to power through your to-do list, don't waste your time on unimportant tasks. On the splendid occasions when you feel motivated and energized, your time is best spent on big things—either things that you've been putting off for a long time or things that require a lot of effort. You'll sleep well knowing that you put your brain and time to good use that day.

6. Do something fun first.

To get your mind in the mood to do those tasks that are less-than-enjoyable, try doing something you love first. Some adults with ADHD find that a quick game of pick-up basketball or reading a chapter of a book will stimulate their brain enough that they can turn their attention to the more challenging task. Just remember to set a timer so you don't get so caught up in the fun activity that you forget to do the necessary one!

“Outsmarting ADHD isn't a matter of ‘trying harder,’ as you know. Outsmarting ADHD is a process of adjusting your habits, environment, and structure. It takes time and energy and practice.”

—DANA RAYBURN, ADHD COACH

Following Through

If you have no problem getting started, but find yourself leaving projects halfway through—due to boredom or frustration—try following these strategies suggested by Stacey Turis, an adult living with ADHD, and Michele Novotni, Ph.D., an internationally recognized ADHD expert:

1. Create an ideal work environment.

It's clear as day: You'll focus best on your work in an environment that's perfectly attuned to *your* unique focusing style. Shaping your perfect workspace doesn't necessarily have to mean converting your spare bedroom into an office—though you certainly can, if you'd like! Instead, the “ideal workspace” depends on something more intangible than its own room; it depends more on the perfect formula of what will help *you* focus more, be more productive, and stick with tasks even when they get hard.

For some, this might mean stashing a pair of earplugs in their purse to block out noise at work. For others, it might mean shutting the door and

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blasting loud music. Some adults with ADHD say they like to lie on the floor as they work, while others need to walk around. Figure out what helps you focus, then make the tools easily accessible—no matter where you need to work on a task.

2. Break down tasks.

We learned this when we were writing our to-do lists, but it's important enough to reiterate here: Smaller steps are less intimidating. When you're losing steam, challenge yourself to complete the next two small steps before you take a break. Once you cross these tiny hurdles, you'll realize you have it in you to keep going—maybe even for another two steps.

3. Set your own deadlines.

You swear up and down that you work best under pressure, but you still miss deadlines or exhaust yourself with all-nighters. Creating your own deadlines for each step of a project allows you to complete each portion “under pressure”—just not the real pressure that comes from turning in a work assignment late!

4. Start off easy.

It may seem counterintuitive, but starting with the easy steps and saving the hard tasks for later can actually make you more productive in the long run. Christine Brady, a longtime contributor to *ADDitude*, writes: “To keep my brain from getting punked by the difficult stuff, I do the easy things first. For example, do my dishes right now? Overwhelming. But instead of thinking, ‘Good Lord, I cannot do this,’ I try to think, ‘OK, just the silverware.’ And then, ‘Since I already did that, maybe I’ll do the glasses.’ I continue to make headway, until—to my amazement—all the dishes are done.”

5. Use visual cues to stay on task.

If distraction is your problem, set up a visual cue for yourself to redirect your attention when you lose track of it. One trick is to post a big sticky note on the source of major distraction—your phone, for example. When you reach for your phone in a moment of weakness, you’ll see the note gently reminding you to get back to work.

ARE YOU IN THE WRONG JOB?

Read ADHD-friendly guidelines for finding the career that's right for you at <http://additu.de/wrong-job>

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6. Make it public.

Once you start something, tell someone—your spouse, a close friend, or a coworker—what you’re doing. Social pressure can be a big motivational tool, and it’s harder to give up on a task when we know we’ll be held accountable for it. If you’re close to the person, ask them to check in with you periodically to make sure you’re still on track.

Overcoming Emotional Hurdles

It’s a vicious cycle. Missed deadlines and abandoned projects lead to shame and low self-esteem, which in turn cause you to miss more deadlines and abandon more projects. You can’t undo past mistakes, but you can consciously turn your back on shame, says Ned Hallowell, M.D. “Whenever you feel shame raise its ugly head, take a second to take stock of your talents and strengths,” he says. “ADHD is characterized by creativity, initiative, persistence, originality, and more.”

Learning to recognize these traits in yourself—particularly when you’re worried about missing a deadline or messing up a project—can give you a self-esteem boost and make you more inclined to follow through.

What else can you do? Dr. Tuckman offers these suggestions to adults struggling with missed-deadline shame:

1. Accept good instead of perfect.

A lot of us hold ourselves to standards that are impossibly high, and when our work doesn’t turn out perfectly, we give up or feel badly about ourselves. If this is you, you probably notice yourself going through short bursts of excited energy on a project—followed by long periods of anger and avoidance. If you find yourself missing deadlines because you’re trying to make everything “perfect,” it may help to change your mindset. “Completing a project is better than trying to perfect one that is late,” says Dr. Tuckman. “You don’t get partial credit for ‘almost done.’”

2. Do it now.

Follow the two-minute rule: if you can complete something in under two minutes, do it right away. If it’ll take longer, set up a reminder to restart it at a specific time and date.

“I had a couple of moments last year when I was overwhelmed and stressed. I recognized my feelings and chose to let something go instead of beating myself up about it. I consider those victories.” —BARBARA, AN ADDITUDE READER

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3. Accept—and expect—challenges.

You may feel like you're the only one who struggles with missed deadlines or incomplete projects. You're not! Everyone struggles with something, and part of adulthood is learning to handle these difficulties as they come. If you often miss deadlines, the first step is accepting this about yourself. Then you can experiment with different systems to improve your punctuality with each subsequent project.

4. Don't compare yourself to others.

We all have that one friend who works full-time, raises three kids, and cooks five-star meals every night—all seemingly without breaking a sweat. It can be tempting to compare yourself to her and feel like a failure. But trust us: You excel at some things that Judy can't do, and we all know looks can be deceiving.

5. Pick your battles.

Knowing when to stick it out—and more importantly, when to walk away—is imperative when it comes to moving past embarrassment or anger. If you're fighting a losing battle, there is no shame in laying down your sword.

Of course, some responsibilities—like work or school—can't be entirely ignored. But if you're trying (and failing!) to balance work, home, and social responsibilities, take stock of what's on your plate and see what you can give up. If your weekly volunteer project is becoming too demanding, for example, see if you can cut it down to every other week. Don't think of it as a failure—by freeing up your time and energy, you can devote more time to your family, your friends, or your hobbies. After all, it's better to successfully meet *most* demands than it is to fail at *all* of them.

“When my Uncle Dominique died, before I could thank him for the \$100 he gave me for college, it was the last straw,” writes *ADDitude* blogger Douglas Cootey. “Something in me changed, and I never made mistakes like that again. Instead of this being another case where ADHD brought me regret, I decided to draw a line in the sand. I started leaving notes for myself, and, more important, I followed through on them. I had no choice but to manage my ADHD or face embarrassment and guilt until the day I died.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

Delivered from Distraction,
by Ned Hallowell and John
Ratey

CHAPTER 4 Get Started. Stay Focused.

Procrastinate More Productively

It's no coincidence that procrastination and ADHD go hand-in-hand. ADHD brains produce abnormally low levels of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that is particularly active in the brain's frontal lobe, which controls executive function—our ability to analyze, organize, decide, and execute. Without sufficient dopamine flowing, we just can't seem to get started, even if we know a task is important. So we wait and wait and wait until panic and deadline pressure cause our hearts to pound and our dopamine levels to go through the roof. Then we dive in and hyperfocus until the job is done—usually 2 minutes after it was due.

“Sometimes, a person with ADHD can hit the do-or-die deadline and produce lots of high-quality work in a short time,” says Dr. Dodson. “A whole semester of study is crammed into a single night of hyperfocused perfection... Lurching from crisis to crisis, however, is a tough way to live life.”

If this sounds familiar, you're probably famous for saying “I work best under pressure.” But you're probably also becoming more and more aware each year that constant “pressure” is not good for your health—or the health of your relationships. If that's the case, we recommend using the strategies outlined above to avoid procrastination before you get lost in it. But, when you absolutely positively just can't get started yet, we recommend using the tips below to make your time more productive, even when you're “wasting” it. Sandy Maynard, an internationally recognized ADHD coach, suggests the following tips to procrastinate “the right way:”

1. Set the Table

“Accept the fact that there will be times when you are unable to concentrate,” says Maynard. “This will leave wiggle room for those days when productive procrastination to do a mindless task is a better choice than struggling to work on a priority.” What does this mean? For Maynard's client Susan, it meant understanding that she focused best in the morning—not in the afternoon, when her meds were wearing off. By powering through difficult tasks first thing in the morning, Susan felt better about “wasting time” later on, when she was starting to lose focus. She could tie up loose ends and finish mindless chores, all while setting the stage for getting more work done the following morning.

EXPERT WEBINAR

7 Ways to Be More Productive—And Crush It at Work
<http://additu.de/7-ways>

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2. Make Smarter Choices About Your Time

If you can't focus, you may decide to throw in the towel completely and browse Facebook for four hours—leaving you feeling ashamed later when you look back at how you spent your time. Instead, Maynard suggests, you should aim to spend that time positively—even if you aren't able to do work. One of her clients, Heather, knows that exercise is good for her, so when she can't focus on her work, she goes for a walk instead. Another client, Gary, meditates at his desk if he's having trouble finishing a report. They're still procrastinating, Maynard says, but they're doing it in a more positive way.

3. Be Slow to Switch Gears

“Make your best effort to stay focused for at least 20 minutes before you choose to switch gears,” says Maynard. “Sometimes it takes that long for our mind chatter to quiet down. If you're still as scattered afterward, do something else to use your time productively.”

4. Find Some Positive Role Models

Christine Brady wrote: “Hang out with people who have their working act together. My Sagittarius boyfriend does. Watching him do dishes inspires me to start a load of laundry.” Seeing the people around you achieve their goals can be the kick in the butt your brain needs to get started.

5. Don't Beat Yourself Up!

Negative self-talk doesn't make us more likely to complete a task—in fact, it can drag our spirits down so low that we're worse off than we were before! Instead, it's important to send yourself positive, realistic messages about what you can achieve. For example: Don't tell yourself, “This will take forever, and it's so late already” or “Guess I wasted another work day!” Substitute something like, “I might not be able to finish this project today, but if I start now I bet I can get the first two steps done.”

Stay optimistic and look toward the future, instead of dwelling on the past. If your procrastination continues to frustrate you, focus on how good you'll feel (or how much you'll get paid!) once you start to cross things off your to-do list.

YOUR OWN WORST ENEMY
Silencing negative self-talk is easier said than done. Learn strategies for managing expectations and being kinder to yourself at <http://additu.de/negative-talk>

CHAPTER 5

**Keep Your Eye
on the Ball**

Chapter 5: Keep Your Eye on the Ball

How to remain engaged in what matters most, stick with tough (and boring) tasks, and avoid common distractions

It's a common misconception that adults with ADHD are "unable to focus." Truth is, we can focus just fine; our problem is that we can't stay focused, or we have trouble focusing on the "right" thing. "That's especially true when the activity calling for our attention isn't one that we find especially engaging," says Patricia Quinn, M.D. If you've ever nodded off during a droning meeting, or missed huge chunks of a boring lecture thanks to the birds outside the classroom window, you know what Dr. Quinn is talking about.

You're Engaged! Really, You Are.

When the task is inherently boring, our instincts tell us to check out. Dr. Quinn has worked with adults and children with ADHD for more than 30 years, and over the years she's developed these six strategies to fight these instincts when it matters most:

1. Get it in writing.

Words can float in one ear and out the other if you don't have a written "map" to help you stay grounded and focused, or to highlight the bits that don't sink in the first time. Whether at work or at school, ask for a copy of all written materials—like slides, meeting agendas, or lecture outlines—beforehand. Following along as you go (and taking notes!) will help you redirect your focus when it wanders.

2. Get the best seat in the house.

"Where you sit is critical," says Dr. Quinn. Sitting next to a window, a noisy air conditioner, or in the back of the room is a terrible idea. Arrive early so you have unlimited options—and, when in doubt, aim for the seat closest to the front. You will find it easier to focus on a speaker or a presentation when it's physically closer to you—and if you fear getting called on.

3. Review ASAP.

Right after a meeting or lecture wraps up, talk to a co-worker, friend, or your teacher for a quick review of the main points. Focus on takeaways—

BONUS TIP

To better avoid distraction, make sure you truly understand the task at hand. "Have the assertive skills to ask for clarification when you need it," says Geraldine Markel, Ph.D. "You'll be able to reduce some of the distractions that plague you because you'll suffer less frustration."

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what you need to work on next, what priorities have changed, or whether you should consult any ancillary resources.

4. Avoid burnout.

If you have scheduling power, set up boring tasks early in the morning (or whenever your focus is greatest). If you can't control when your team meets or what time a lecture kicks off, make sure you're sleeping enough each night (a whole other can of worms, we realize!), and giving yourself well-timed energy boosts when you need them. If you feel your mind getting exhausted half an hour before a big meeting, go for a walk outside or drink a quick cup of coffee.

5. Fidget away.

Fidgets are small movements that can help anyone with ADHD maintain focus—think knitting or doodling or squeezing on a stress ball. As long as you're not distracting others, you should use this invaluable tool to your heart's content. We do not recommend clicking a pen repeatedly, or popping your gum loudly; there are more considerate ways to fidget for sure.

6. Follow a strong leader.

If you're a college student selecting classes, try to select professors who are well-organized, engaging, and able to help you when times get tough. At work, request most assignments with colleagues whom you know you work well with. If that's not possible, consider asking your boss for accommodations like getting deadlines in writing or wearing noise-canceling headphones.

“Did You Hear a Single Thing I Said?”

OK, so you struggle to focus on boring tasks. That's true for many people. More troubling to many adults with ADHD are the times when we can't focus on things that do matter to us—our best friend describing a difficult breakup or our boss outlining an exciting new project at work. As much as we desperately want to pay close attention, we find ourselves tuning out or becoming distracted by our other senses.

When this happens, we feel awful. “What's wrong with me? Why can't I listen to Jessica talk for two minutes without getting distracted? I must be a terrible friend.”

FIDGET BETTER

For more easy-to-implement fidget ideas, read [*Fidget to Focus*](#), by Roland Rotz and Sarah Wright.

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“You’re not weird, cold, or rude,” says Lynn Weiss, Ph.D. “You have ADHD. Your brain focuses on the connections and relationships between things more than on specific bits of information, so you’re likely to drift away from a single thought into a complex web of feelings and ideas. Don’t beat yourself up or feel helpless because of it.”

How can you stop the shame—AND tune in to the things you want to hear? Dr. Weiss has these tips:

1. Engage more senses.

When you feel your mind start to drift, politely ask the speaker to repeat herself. “If you ask with confidence, your request is usually perceived as a compliment,” says Dr. Weiss. “The other person thinks that she said something so important that it should be said again!” Nod slightly as she speaks, and periodically rephrase what she said back to her. This will help you process your thoughts before replying, and it lets the person know you’re paying attention.

2. Deal with distractions.

If you’re distracted by a thought or feeling, make a mental note to attend to it later—and set aside a few minutes later in the day to follow through. If noise or hunger is distracting you, ask to move the conversation to somewhere quiet or closer to a snack.

3. Develop a “reminder” for yourself.

Whenever you feel your attention start to drift, wiggle your toes inside your shoes to remind yourself to get back on track. This also serves as a quick fidget—another tool to keep your attention focused when it starts to wane.

Last but not least, Dr. Weiss says: “Whenever possible, avoid boring situations—and people.” If you consistently find yourself tuning out when one of your friends is talking, it may just be that you’re not compatible—and that’s okay.

Manage Your Motivation

Focus and motivation go hand in hand. If your attention drifts too often—even from something you find enjoyable—you may start to wonder, “Why

“An ADHD diagnosis is not a ‘Get Out of Work Free’ card, and I have yet to come across a single person with ADHD who believes it is.” —BETH MAIN, ADHD COACH

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bother?” or feel so defeated by past mistakes that you fear moving forward and repeating the heartache.

“Not being able to get things done when we feel unmotivated ranks up there with other things humans can’t do—breathing underwater, licking our elbows, or sneezing with our eyes open!” says Laurie Dupar, PMHNP. “Tackling a to-do list without motivation is not impossible, but it takes a lot of energy—and for some, it actually feels physically painful.” Lack of motivation makes us feel listless, down on ourselves, and willing to surrender to failure—which in turn, leads to even less motivation than before!

An important part of getting motivated is letting go of these negative feelings. Dupar says if we “learn to tap into the meaning, importance, or worth of the task at hand,” we’ll be more motivated to tackle our to-do lists, or pull ourselves back from the brink of distraction. Here are some ways to do that:

- **Reward yourself throughout the day.**

To boost your self-esteem, set aside time throughout the day to do things that you know will kick start your creativity or your serotonin. “This is not an option,” Dupar says. “This is essential. It will recharge your battery; it’s like making sure you have your oxygen mask on before putting on someone else’s.” How can you do this? Make a list of 10 simple pleasures, like listening to upbeat music or going for a walk. Refer to and use this list whenever you’re feeling down.

- **Remove the “shoulds” from your life.**

“I should do the laundry.” “I should try for that promotion at work.” Statements like these are motivation killers because they make us feel like prisoners to the wants and expectations of others. To improve motivation, turn these “shoulds” into “wants.” Ask yourself what about the task is enjoyable—even if it’s just a tiny bit! For example, say “I want to do the laundry because I’ll feel great when the basket is finally empty!” or “I want to do the laundry because I love how the warm clothes feel as I fold them.”

- **Tap into your creativity.**

You’re bursting with creative energy, but can’t for the life of you put it to use on a boring task. Try to think of ways to inject your to-do list with fun. Dance around as you vacuum the house, or time yourself and try to beat your previous record. Try anything!

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- **Get a body double.**

It's easier to stay on task when someone is along for the ride. This person doesn't have to help—or even talk. They can sit in the room quietly while you're trying to get something done; their presence may be enough to kick you into gear. Ask your spouse, a close friend, or even an older child to hang out with you while you complete chores. If you get off task, they have permission to give you a nudge back in the right direction.

- **Delegate!**

Delegation isn't a dirty word. "Another person might actually enjoy doing a task you find dreary," says Dupar. "Give yourself permission to let go of what you don't do well and let someone else do the chore or task."

THE ART OF DELEGATING

Read how a mom with ADHD learned to share her chore load at [http://additude.de/delegate](http://additude/delegate)

Asking the Right Questions

When Dupar's clients struggle with motivation, she asks them these questions to kick their brains into gear:

- What excites or re-energizes you? What recharges your batteries?
- What old beliefs about what you "should" do might not be true?
- Who else can do this task more easily than you?
- Think about a time in your past when completing a similar type of task wasn't so hard. What was different? Can you bring some of those elements into the situation now?
- How can you break this task down into three pieces so it feels more manageable?
- How will you reward yourself when you complete this task?
- What would you need to let go of to allow someone else to take it over?
- What needs to change to turn this "should" into a "want"?
- What are you good at?
- What self-talk do you notice that you can let go of?
- What about this task is important or meaningful to you?
- When is the best time for you to do this task?
- What support do you have to get this task done?

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- What obstacles are preventing you from completing this task?
- Which of these can you eliminate now?
- How can you make this task fun, interesting, or enjoyable?

Distraction and lack of motivation aren't things you can will away, and telling yourself to "just try harder" will be counterproductive in the long run. "We don't work that way," says Dupar. "Nobody works that way." Instead, she suggests looking at your focus and motivation struggles as a way to enlist your creative problem-solving skills. "The key to putting the meaning back in motivation is to let go of the way it works for everybody else," she says. "Use your out-of-the-box thinking to come up with a fun, interesting, and rewarding way to make it work for you."

Deleting Digital Distractions

You're plugging away at work when—ping!—your phone lights up with a Facebook notification. A friend you haven't seen in years wrote an old inside joke on your wall, and you can't resist posting a funny retort. "It'll just take a minute!" you tell yourself. Two hours later, you're all caught up on your Facebook friends' photos, meals, and political thoughts—but you haven't accomplished a single scrap of work.

Digital distractions are incredibly potent and dangerous, in part because they deliver the dopamine rush and/or validation that so many of us with ADHD crave. With Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, and Twitter to contend with, it's a wonder we get anything done at all.

"The digital world lets us work, be entertained, share, learn, and get connected, unhampered by walls, geography, time zones, or language," says Judith Kolberg. "But the neurochemistry of the ADHD brain can quickly turn these digital wonders into 'extraneous stimuli' that are very difficult to screen out." The result? We dedicate too much time and precious "brain space" to status updates and cat videos.

In today's world, it's nearly impossible to go "off the grid" entirely—and few of us would care to try. So how do we stop these digital stimuli from taking over our lives?

RITUALS FOR BETTER FOCUS AT WORK

We asked ADDitude readers how they stayed focused at work. Read our 14 favorite strategies at <http://additu.de/lv>

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First, says Kolberg, “Recognize that digital messages are dumb. They don’t know what you’re engaged in. They don’t know what’s important to you.” Even the most fascinating Facebook update can’t match the satisfaction you feel from achieving a real-world goal or catching up with a close friend in person. Use these ADHD-designed strategies to remind you of that, and to get the digital monkey off your back.

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—Oh My!

Beth Main, an ADHD coach who herself has ADHD, loves Facebook. She can manage her professional and personal spheres in one place, and it’s an easier way to keep up on her friends’ lives than email or phone calls. “But there’s a lot of, um, stuff to sift through,” she says. “Why are people I barely know starting virtual pillow fights with me? Why do I need to know which character in Star Trek I would be? This is not how I want to spend my time.”

She knows “the ADHD tendency to hyperfocus makes us especially vulnerable.” So Main has devised these strategies to get the most out of Facebook (and Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and any other social networking tool), without draining your productivity:

1. Develop “rules of engagement” for social media.

Schedule a brief slot each day to check your Facebook page, Twitter feed, or Instagram account. Set start and stop reminders in your phone to make this window more set in stone. “Snacking” on distractions like this—instead of cutting yourself off cold turkey—makes it more likely that you’ll keep to your schedule and meet your goals.

2. Set an automatic time limit for distracting websites.

Set a timer or use one of the automatic tools at your disposal for setting time limits for common “time suck” sites—or blocking them out entirely. Check out our favorites in the sidebar!

3. Filter your Facebook down to the essentials.

Everyone has that one Facebook friend who spams your feed with “Starting the laundry!” or “About to head to the gym!” Click “Hide” the next time you see an annoying status update from them. Similarly, block any and all applications that annoy you (remember FarmVille?), to whittle down your feed to the good stuff.

OUR FAVORITE TOOLS FOR BLOCKING DISTRACTIONS

- 1. StayFocusd**
(Google Chrome)
- 2. LeechBlock (Firefox)**
- 3. SelfControl (Mac)**
- 4. Morphine**
(Google Chrome)
- 5. Strict Workflow**
(Google Chrome)

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5. Be selective about who you follow on Twitter and Instagram.

It's so easy to click "Follow," especially in apps—but before you know it, you're following 1,000 accounts that only post pictures of cats. Before you follow someone, pause and think for a moment about how following them might benefit your social media experience—and don't be afraid to unfollow.

6. Watch what you click.

Some links lead to quizzes and games that, to a distractible ADHD brain, can only mean more wasted time. Unless the post clearly indicates where a link will go (and you trust the person posting it!) don't click it.

Controlling Email Overload

Email is a necessary menace. Many of us need it for work, but we don't know how to manage it effectively so we waste time checking it too often, responding to every email that comes in, or ignoring it until it's overloaded and impossible to navigate.

Main calls email "the big black hole of productivity." She's come up with 7 strategies for keeping your inbox in check.

1. Archive—or delete—as you read.

Set up folders in your inbox, and sort messages into them. Start with "Work," "Personal," "Advertisement," and "Needs Follow Up," adding more as you see fit. Whenever you open an email, get into the habit of moving it to the correct folder right away. This includes the Trash folder! Delete all emails you know you'll never need again.

2. Preview before diving in.

Most email clients show you the first few lines of an email in your inbox dashboard. If you can tell something is unimportant, delete it without wasting time opening it.

3. Turn off alerts.

An email popping up in the corner of our screen—often accompanied by a distracting "ding!"—can divert our focus from even the most interesting task. Turn off visual and sound alerts. "Having attention called to each new message is a distraction that adults with ADHD don't need," says Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D.

ADHD AT WORK: HELPFUL BOOKS

Making ADD Work,
by Blythe Grossberg, Psy.D.
Scattered Minds,
by Lenard Adler, M.D.

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4. Make your inbox work for you.

Use the inbox tools at your disposal! Set up email filters for emails you want to receive, but don't need to read right away, like catalogs or quarterly updates from your favorite charity. When they come in, they'll automatically be moved to their designated folder—allowing you to peruse them or delete them at your leisure.

5. Don't forget to follow up!

Flag emails for follow up or put them in a specific folder that you'll periodically check over. Set a time in your to-do list to look through and reply to messages that need an answer.

6. Keep it short and snappy.

Many adults with ADHD spend too much time trying to get the wording “just right”—usually on emails that don't require it. “It sounds odd,” says Main, “but we distractible people with ADHD are obsessive. Don't obsess. Just spit it out!”

7. Don't use your inbox as a to-do list.

Don't try to keep track of your tasks just using your email — it doesn't work, and you'll waste time searching for what you need to do next. Instead, when you get an email with a new project, mark it down on your to-do list or schedule it into your planner—then archive the email and move on.

One final thought: Jeff Copper, an ADHD coach who specializes in helping clients avoid information overload, warns that giving in to digital distractions may actually impair your mental health. “Constant short-term stimulation leads to more long-term boredom,” he says. “As long-term boredom increases, depression rates go up substantially.” Learning to deal with boredom without relying exclusively on digital distractions will help you manage your productivity, your mood, and your life—all while saving you countless hours spent reading inconsequential Facebook updates.

“I've sent an inappropriate e-mail to my supervisor on more than one occasion. It cost me my job. Since then, I've been extra careful about re-reading e-mails before sending them.” —ANONYMOUS

CHAPTER 6

See Time More Clearly, Use It More Wisely

Chapter 6: See Time More Clearly, Use It More Wisely

How to better estimate how much time you really need, avoid overbooking, and stop stressing out

“People with ADHD don’t have a reliable sense of time,” says Dr. Dodson. “Everything happens right now or not at all. Time is a meaningless abstraction. It seems important to other people, but people with ADHD have never gotten the hang of it.”

It’s true: You’re bad with time. You underestimate how long things will take, pack in too many obligations, and show up 20 minutes late to all your appointments. You don’t do so maliciously, of course, but a lifetime of flakiness may have led others to not trust you when you say “I’ll get this to you by tomorrow.”

Recent research links problems with time to executive functioning deficiencies, most likely originating in the frontal lobe. Executive functioning—when it’s working properly—allows us to perceive time accurately and plan tasks efficiently. When it’s not working, it can lead to something that Dr. Ari Tuckman calls “time blindness.”

Time Blindness

What is “time blindness?” According to Dr. Tuckman, it’s a condition often linked to adults and kids with ADHD, where they’re not aware of the passage of time in the same way their neurotypical peers are. In [Understand Your Brain, Get More Done](#), Dr. Tuckman breaks down time blindness into the following sub-types:

- **You see time as fluid.**

You cannot accurately gauge how much time has passed. Ten minutes doing something you hate can feel like two hours, while two hours playing a video game can pass in the blink of an eye.

- **You underestimate time.**

When trying to figure out how long something will take, you tend to err on the side of less time, not more—meaning your schedule usually feels overstuffed.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

ADHD runs in families—and so do the time-management struggles that go with it. Get strategies for teaching your child how to manage time at <http://additu.de/time-kids>

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- **You're always scrambling.**

No matter what you do, it seems like you're always running around like a chicken with its head cut off, trying to finish what you need to do. You're always stressed, and always trying to "save time" or push yourself to go faster.

- **You "waste" time.**

Others criticize you for ignoring "important" tasks in favor of less important ones—even though you don't consciously decide to do so.

Regardless of your specific problem, chances are good that your "time horizon" is stunted. In other words, you don't look far enough into the future to plan what needs to get done. This type of planning comes naturally for many neurotypical people. For anyone with ADHD, it has to be learned—which can take awhile. The good news? The following strategies, if applied consistently, can help you improve your sense of time and tackle the specific issues holding you back.

I'm Late, I'm Late!

You don't mean to be late. Your tardiness is not for lack of trying, and it's definitely *not* because you don't care. But chronic tardiness—a common time-related problem for adults with ADHD—can make other people feel like you don't value their time, leaving them feeling hurt or angry. This, in turn, can have a negative effect on your career, your relationships, and your stress levels.

Below, we've aggregated some expert strategies for bolstering your planning skills to help you get better at showing up to appointments on time. The key here is to mix and match, and figure out what works best for you in overcoming chronic lateness.

1. Change what it means to be "on time."

Many people with ADHD mistakenly believe they should show up for an appointment right at the scheduled time. "Big mistake," says Michele Novotni, Ph.D. "It's always safer to plan on arriving 15 minutes early. That way, if you run into traffic or experience some other delay, there's a good chance you will still make it on time."

Novotni suggests thinking like a salesman: under-promise and over-deliver. Whenever you can, plan a time that will give you as much wiggle

"Periodically ask yourself why you're in such a hurry, and take the question seriously. If the answer is 'because I'm late,' assess your priorities and cut out unnecessary responsibilities. The time you save should be devoted solely to personal or family time."

—NED HALLOWELL, M.D.

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room as possible, then plan to get there early anyway. Don't be afraid to be early! "If you're worried that you might become bored if you have to wait, bring along a book or magazine—or plan on using the time to write a letter, make a phone call, or take a walk," Novotni says.

2. Forget about finishing “one more thing.”

Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D., calls this “one-more-thing-itis,” or the need to cram in one more additional task that often derails your perfectly scheduled day. “One-more-thing-itis is a form of distractibility,” Nadeau says. “The phone rings, you answer it, you notice that the table needs to be cleared, or a plant needs to be watered, and, once again, you run late.”

How can you beat it? First, think through the steps you need to complete before you're ready to go. Gather necessary items and figure out directions the night before, if possible. Then, Nadeau says, keep yourself on track audibly: “Remind yourself, out loud and repeatedly, ‘I'm leaving now, I'm going to the car.’” You might feel a little foolish, but you'll remember what you're supposed to be doing—and you'll leave at your scheduled time for once.

3. Just say no.

Nadeau insists we ditch the habit of saying “yes” to every request—whether out of habit or out of guilt. Adults with ADHD aim to please, which can cause us to overcommit, increasing the likelihood that we'll be late to something. Get in the habit of saying “no” to everything, at least until you check your schedule. You'll be less stressed, and more likely to be on time.

4. Use alarms liberally.

Alarms aren't just for waking up. You can also use them to get out the door on time, or to remind yourself to transition from one task to another. Don't be afraid to set more than one—if you tend to brush off a 10-minute warning, set another alarm for 5 minutes, 2 minutes, and right when you need to go. You might miss one alarm, but it's hard to miss four!

5. Search for or create patterns.

Ned Hallowell, M.D., advises adults with ADHD to engage in “pattern planning,” where “you assign recurring tasks to be done the same day and time each week.” What does this look like? Hallowell gives an example: “Tuesday at 9 a.m. you meet with your assistant; Thursday after work you stop at the

A KEENER SENSE OF TIME Sharpen your awareness of time with tools like these:

[TimeTimer](#): displays time as a red disc that gets smaller as time elapses

[WatchMinder](#): lets you program fixed times or interval times, and set message reminders

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dry cleaners; Saturday after breakfast you pay bills; and every other Friday you have a date night with your significant other.” If you get used to something—including how long it typically takes you to get there—you increase your chances of getting there on time and getting the task done.

6. Be realistic.

Can anyone—except maybe Wonder Woman—really cook a five-course meal *and* pick up the kids in an hour? Absolutely not. If you’re honest with yourself about what you can accomplish in a specific amount of time, you’ll free yourself from trying to be Superman, and be able to devote more time to the goals you can achieve.

7. Time yourself.

If you make a trip frequently, time how long it takes you from one day to the next. “You may be surprised to find that your ‘10-minute’ trip to the grocery store really takes 20 minutes,” says Novotni. You’ll better understand your transit time, and you’ll be able to make better estimates when it comes to trips you’ve never made before. And remember: If it’s a new route, use Google Maps to estimate how much time it’ll take you—then add an extra 20 percent to that estimate.

8. Imagine worst- and best-case scenarios.

When you’re late, it affects other people. Maybe a friend is kept waiting, or maybe your boss has to rearrange her schedule. Before an important appointment, imagine what it would feel like for the other person if you showed up late, and what the negative consequences of that would be. Then, imagine how smoothly things would go if you showed up on time. Envisioning positive outcomes is an easy mental exercise, but basking in their positive glow can help nudge you toward success.

9. Use what works for you.

“You’re probably not late for *all* of your appointments,” says Novotni. “Some people who would never dream of being late for work are frequently late for social appointments. Think about the strategies you use when you *are* on time, and use them for all of your appointments, personal and work-related.”

THE MYTH OF SUPERMOM

Tired of feeling like you have to do everything? Read about how ADHD affects moms at [http://additude.adhd-mom](http://additude/adhd-mom)

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An Exercise in Time Estimation

We've talked about it before: adults with ADHD aren't great at estimating how long it takes to drive from Point A to Point B, how long appointments really take, or how much time we need to get ready. As a result, we overbook ourselves, then let things fall through the cracks when we can't get to them all.

The way to get past this overbooking barrier is to force yourself to get better at estimating time. How? Practice, practice, practice! Sandy Maynard has her clients wear a combination stopwatch/timer around their necks. They estimate how long it takes them to complete routine tasks, like a load of laundry. Then they set the timer accordingly. If the timer goes off before they are done, they turn on the stopwatch to see just how far off their estimate was. We recommend that you try this system for about a week, whenever you have a straightforward task to complete. By week's end, you should be able to identify a pattern.

If you do find a pattern, use it to your advantage. One of Maynard's clients, Susan, realized that she was good at estimating time for her work-related tasks, but projects at home always threw her for a loop. They discussed it, and deduced that Susan felt more in control of time at work because her priorities were straightforward, she had strict deadlines, and she was used to the daily routine of her desk job. At home, her time was her own—and she ended up misjudging it as a result. How did she solve this problem? She brought the benefits of structure from her workspace to her home. She planned a routine for taking care of household chores, and slotted in specific times for recreational activities so she wasn't overbooking her time with friends. The result: She felt more productive and more in control of her time—plus, since she was wasting less of it, her evenings and weekends felt longer, happier, and more relaxed!

Harness Your Hyperfocus

“Attention deficit disorder is all about distraction—until it's not,” says Ned Hallowell, M.D. “One of the most surprising aspects of ADHD is hyperfocus: a person's ability to home in on a specific task, sometimes to the exclusion of everything else.”

Hyperfocus is one of the most intriguing—and confusing—parts of living with ADHD. Experts estimate that it's caused by low levels of dopamine,

ADHD FORUMS

For more ADHD time-management strategies, go to additudemag.com/forums

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which can make it difficult to shift attention from one activity to another—particularly when a task is fun and engaging. It’s often viewed as a coping mechanism to conquer the flip side of ADHD (distraction), and gives instant pleasurable feedback to the ADHD brain. But it’s not all fun and games. Adults and kids with ADHD can get so caught up in hyperfocus that they miss important deadlines or activities, which is frustrating for the neurotypical people around them. For someone who doesn’t have ADHD, it’s a struggle to understand why your spouse may be too distracted to complete a chore, but able to focus on a video game for hours at a time.

“At its best,” says Hallowell, “hyperfocus is what psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls ‘flow’—a state of mind in which you are so immersed in a task that you become ‘one’ with it. PET scans have shown that the hyperfocusing brain literally ‘lights up’ with activity and pleasure.” If hyperfocus is used to focus on school, work, or something you really enjoy, it can be a blessing, allowing you to get more done in less time.

But, Hallowell warns, “At its worst, hyperfocus becomes a trance-like state in which you do the same pointless act over and over again. A teen who creates vocabulary cards for an upcoming test, for instance, may spend hours decorating them instead of studying. With hyperfocus, you can easily lose all sense of time and perspective.”

The best way to deal with hyperfocus is to harness it, not fight it. Dr. Hallowell and Bryan Hutchinson, the founder of the ADHD social network [ADDer World](#), offer these tips:

1. Assemble a support system.

You should have a system in place to ensure that all the necessary tasks get completed, even if you get lost in hyperfocus for a few hours. Setting up automatic bill payments, or regular alarms to refocus your attention, is a good start.

2. Let someone else in on it.

Talk to another person—your spouse, your best friend, or anyone else who spends a lot of time with you—about hyperfocus. Explain that it’s related to your ADHD, and you’re not purposely ignoring them when you fall under its spell. If they’re confused, refer them to [Driven to Distraction](#) by Hallowell and John Ratey; it provides an easy-to-understand overview of how hyperfocus can affect the ADHD brain.

WHAT CAN BRAIN SCANS SHOW US?

Are brain scans changing the diagnostic process—or are they science fiction? Learn more at: <http://additude/lo>

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3. Agree on a “snap out of it” cue.

Ask this person to help you recognize when hyperfocus starts to have a negative impact—and help you break its spell before trouble arises. The cue could be a gentle verbal reminder—“Honey, you’ve been focused on restoring that car for two weeks. Can you take a break and go to the movies with me?”—or a physical cue, like a hand on the shoulder. Also agree on an “in case of emergency” tactic in case the hyperfocus is so powerful that the original cue doesn’t work. In this case, your partner may need to physically get between you and the thing you’re hyperfocusing on, or blast loud music to snap you out of your trance.

4. Hyperfocus right.

Hutchinson says he’s learned to switch his hyperfocus on and off, like a light switch. How? He looked back at previous times he was able to hyperfocus successfully, and found a pattern: he had all the tools he needed, had no distractions, and was well hydrated. He realized that if he set up his workstation with everything he needed, nipped common distractions in the bud, and drank water regularly, he could shift into hyperfocus—and hyper-productivity—with ease.

If left unchecked, hyperfocus can lead to problems at work or at home—but remember, there’s nothing inherently wrong with it. If you learn how to harness its power—and how to recognize when it’s getting out of control—you can use it to your advantage. In fact, many with ADHD already do.

“When I used to direct TV commercials, I could never get myself to sit down and do an expense report,” says Frank Coppola, an ADHD coach who himself has ADHD. “But on the set, I’d have nine things going on simultaneously, and I could focus on all of them without any problem.” His ability to slip into hyperfocus when it mattered most helped him effectively manage complex projects.

Don’t Let Stress Win

No matter how efficiently you’re managing a challenging to-do list, one thing can still capsize your productivity: stress.

Stress is inevitable. Everyone gets stressed from time to time, but adults with ADHD experience more than their fair share. Our neurobiology

“I can sit down to work on a project and go, go, go! It would take others double the time to do what I do when my superpower kicks in. It has served me well, especially in emergency situations when acting quickly is critical.”

—BUCK, AN ADDITUDE READER

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makes it difficult to screen out distractions, focus, or relax at the end of a long day — increasing our frustration with life’s daily annoyances. Add to that a lifetime of ADHD-related guilt—possibly combined with comorbid anxiety or depression—and our stress can quickly overwhelm us.

It doesn’t have to be this way. If you can learn to recognize your stress, accept it, and apply techniques to manage it, you can move forward with your life—without succumbing to the negative effects of stress.

Accepting Your ADHD

Jennifer Koretsky is an ADHD coach and author of *Odd One Out: The Maverick’s Guide to Adult ADD*. She says that her clients commonly punish themselves for ADHD problems—and feel like they don’t deserve to manage their stress because of it. “We think that we’re so high-maintenance for those around us—with our disorganization, inability to manage time, and lack of focus—that we need to make up for all the things we are, and are not,” she says. In other words, we feel like stress is our punishment or our burden to bear. We are forever trying to make amends—even at the cost of our own mental health.

“If you feel this way,” says Koretsky, “take a deep breath and read me loud and clear: You are wrong! You’re punishing yourself for who you are. Having ADHD might make you difficult to deal with at times (I certainly am), but it does not make you a bad person.”

If you punish yourself for your failures—for example, cancelling a dinner date because you didn’t clean your desk like you meant to—you’ll feel worse about yourself in the long run and rob yourself of much needed self-care. “We wouldn’t impose the punishments on others that we impose on ourselves,” says Koretsky. “If you don’t allow yourself time to manage your stress, slow down, and make self-care a priority, you’ll never break out of the overwhelm-burnout cycle. You’ll be forever stressed, trying to catch up and feeling like you owe something to everyone.”

Bottom line, she says? When it comes to stress, “Stop punishing yourself. Start living.”

COMING TO TERMS

After a lifetime of struggle, accepting an ADHD diagnosis isn’t always easy. Follow the steps to self-acceptance at <http://additu.de/accept>

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Understanding Your Stress

So how do you do that? The first step is deceptively simple: knowing when you're stressed. "People with ADHD often don't recognize that they're stressed until they're in the middle of a meltdown," says Nancy Ratey, Ed.M. Stress is worse when it sneaks up on you, so it's important that you learn to recognize it before it gets out of control.

What does stress feel like? Well, it's different for everyone, but these patterns tend to apply across the board.

- **Tense muscles:** Take stock of where your body is tightening up and where you're carrying tension. Tight shoulders, jaw, face, or hands are common signals that your body is responding to stress by tensing up.
- **Involuntary and reflex actions:** Some things in our body occur regardless of whether we think about them, like breathing or a heartbeat. When these reflexive actions start to speed up without a conscious choice, it's often a sign of stress. Check your heartbeat and your breathing periodically throughout the day; if either is faster than normal, it may be a physiological sign of stress.

LAUGH IT OFF

Humor can help you deal with ADHD-related stress. Find tips at <http://additu.de/laugh>

Managing Your Stress

Once they learn to identify their stress, Ratey's clients reduce it with these strategies. Some can be applied in the moment, but most are lifestyle changes—you'll need to develop them over time to really use them as a weapon against your stress:

1. Exercise.

Physical activity increases serotonin levels in the brain, giving you a mood boost and lowering levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. Exercising for as little as 30 minutes can immediately improve your mood and increase your relaxation for the next 90 to 120 minutes. Regular exercise over time actually raises your threshold for dealing with stress.

2. Add more structure.

Reliable routines—and well organized to-do lists!—can bring order to your life, making you more equipped to deal with chaos when it arises. Applying the strategies in the preceding chapters will help, but we also recommend going to bed and waking up at the same time each day, even

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on weekends. You'll stabilize your body's rhythms—improving your mood and providing more energy for confronting problems head-on.

3. Measure time.

If you frequently find yourself stressed because you got lost in unimportant tasks—with barely any time left to finish the critical ones—you may need outside reminders to keep your sense of time on track. Buy a wrist-watch that beeps and set it to go off every hour; it won't interfere with your phone's alarms telling you about important appointments, but it will provide a periodic reminder to bring your drifting mind back to work.

4. Create boundaries.

If you're overbooked, you're more likely to be stressed. "Practice saying 'no' three times a day," says Ratey. "And every time you say 'yes,' ask yourself, 'What am I saying no to?'" It could be that by agreeing to take on another project, you're depriving yourself of valuable self-care time.

5. Take breaks.

Schedule plenty of fun into your life! Have dinner with a friend or go to the movies once a week. Take a spontaneous trip every once in a while, or spend a day in the park without letting yourself succumb to feelings of guilt.

6. Identify patterns.

Do you get stressed every day at the same time, or perhaps every time you speak to your boss? Once you figure out when and where you're likely to feel stressed, you can implement strategies to tackle problem areas. These strategies may be as simple as an extra dose of medication at 4 p.m., or as complex as confronting larger problems in your work environment.

7. Stop and breathe.

You may not even notice that you're holding your breath when you encounter stress, but it's a common response. At the beginning of a stressful situation, it's important to remind yourself to keep breathing. Make an effort to breathe smoothly and evenly.

PRACTICE SAYING NO

Simplify your life and assert your boundaries by saying "no" more.

Learn how at <http://additude/say-no>

Simple Solutions to Stress at Work

To truly tackle workplace stress, you'll need to get at the underlying causes and implement the above long-term changes to the way you deal with problems. But a little extra help—sometimes in the form of a secret foot massage—never hurts! Here are some of our favorite “quick fixes” for workplace stress.

1. Squeeze away tension.

Keep stress balls in your desk, and squeeze them whenever you start to feel tense. Baoding balls—also known as Chinese exercise balls — are another option; some come with chimes inside to help anyone who thrives on auditory stimulation.

BONUS:

Use your stress ball as a fidget during long meetings to help you maintain focus.

2. Play footsie.

Buy small foot rollers (you can also use ordinary tennis balls) and place them on the floor underneath your desk. Pressure points in the feet make them the ideal place to give yourself a relaxing massage on the job.

3. Start a “kudos file.”

You probably keep track of every negative review you get at work, but do you ever focus on remembering the positives? Start a file to save thank-you notes, complimentary memos, and anything that praises you for a job well done. Looking at this file when you've hit a rough patch can boost your mood and help reduce stress.

3. Entertain yourself.

If you have personal space at work—whether it's a locker, a cubicle, or a desk—strive to make it yours as much as possible. Put up your favorite photos, or post comic strips that make you laugh. When you're feeling pressure, look up at your fun bulletin board—you'll smile as you focus on the other positive aspects of your life.

4. Pull that lava lamp out of storage.

It sounds silly, we know, but studies have shown that lava lamps have a soothing effect on children and older adults with Alzheimer's disease. No similar studies exist specifically for adults with ADHD, but the underlying principle is the same: the soft lighting and gentle movement of lava lamps can provide sensory stimulation that just might result in a calming effect. Try one out in your office or bedroom, and plug it in when you feel your stress start to mount. You may be surprised!

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9 Conditions Often Diagnosed with ADHD

Depression. Bipolar Disorder. Anxiety. OCD. And five more conditions that often show up alongside attention deficit.

About 80 percent of individuals with ADHD are diagnosed with at least one other psychiatric condition at some time in their lives. This in-depth special report looks at the nine most common, outlining symptoms, treatment strategies, and differentiating features of each. Plus, strategies for living well with any mental health condition.

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Real people with ADHD share personal stories highlighting the lighter side of living with attention deficit.

Never Be Late Again

Time management tips for adults with ADHD.

73 ADHD-Friendly Ways to Organize Your Life Now

Learn how small daily changes can lead to less clutter — and less stress.

Better Time Management with Adult ADHD

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Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:

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Organization Solutions for People with ADHD

>> <http://additu.de/declutter>

Once clutter has built up, the idea of tackling it can be overwhelming — and for many adults with ADHD, it's impossible to even know where to start. In this expert webinar, Susan Pinsky explains why “good enough” is just as good as “perfect,” and imparts simple steps people with ADHD can take to reduce clutter and achieve efficient organization.

The ADHD-Executive Function Connection

>> <http://additu.de/efunction>

We've all heard of executive functions — the brain-based skills that affect how we plan, organize, and carry out tasks. But how do executive functions relate to ADHD — and how can children and adults with the condition compensate for natural deficiencies in these critical skills? Thomas Brown, Ph.D., explains the ins and outs of executive functions and how they affect your focus in this expert webinar.

Just Diagnosed? How to Succeed with Adult ADHD

>> <http://additu.de/just-diagnosed>

A late-in-life ADHD diagnosis doesn't mean it's all over! In honor of ADHD Awareness Month, Michele Novotni, Ph.D., shares strategies for becoming a self-advocate, so you can live your best life with ADHD.

Why People with ADHD Can't Sleep

>> <http://additu.de/adhd-sleep>

Not only is skimping on sleep bad for your overall health and well-being, it can also exacerbate ADHD symptoms. Rest assured — there are numerous ways to improve your sleep hygiene! In this audio and slide presentation, hosted by Roberto Olivardia, Ph.D., learn the science behind ADHD sleep problems and get tips for revamping your circadian rhythm.

Survival Strategies for Moms with ADHD

>> <http://additu.de/moms>

Mothers with ADHD, especially those parenting children with ADHD, often put the needs of others before themselves. Despite good intentions, when moms leave their own ADHD untreated, the whole family can suffer. In this webinar, hosted by Ellen Littman, Ph.D., learn to let go of society's expectations of being “perfect” and focus on your own accomplishments.

7 Fixes for Self-Defeating ADHD Behaviors

>> <http://additu.de/brown>

Are your bad habits setting you up for failure? Find out what behaviors to watch for, and seven simple changes that can help you reach your full potential and put you on the path to success. Entrepreneur and ADHD coach Alan Brown teaches “fix-it” strategies that he used to cope with his own ADHD.

FREE ADHD Newsletters from ADDitude

Sign up to receive critical news and information about ADHD diagnosis and treatment, plus strategies for school, parenting, and living better with ADHD: <http://additu.de/newsletter>

Adult ADHD and LD

Expert advice on managing your household, time, money, career, and relationships

Parenting Children with ADHD or LD

Behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, making friends, and more critical strategies for parents

ADHD and LD at School

How to get classroom accommodations, finish homework, work with teachers, find the right schools, and much more

Treating ADHD

Treatment options including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies

For Women with ADHD

Managing ADHD on the job, running a household, dealing with challenging emotions, and much more.