

Structure: Practical Strategies for Coping with ADHD

Keep a daily agenda of what you have to do.

Write down each appointment and task. When you complete something, check it off. It is important not only to see what you have to do but also to see what you have completed. Too often the emphasis is totally placed on those things that have to be done rather than tackling and completing once task at a time. Your agenda is the pace to write down shopping lists, mileage, or expenses. You can design your own agenda or daily planner to fit your needs.

Get a watch with a timer.

Many adults with characteristics of ADHD are chronically late because of their distorted sense of time. They are late to work, for appointments, church, social occasions – not because they do not want to attend these functions – but because they are side tracked by other things or even their own thoughts. Something gets their attention, that reminds them of something else, and then they are off on a mind journey that makes them late for life's daily journey for which they are accountable.

Plan your time.

Set the alarm for five minutes before you have to leave for an appointment or meeting. If you are on the computer, turn it off. If you are on the phone, politely excuse yourself, make a notation in your daily agenda to call the person back, if needed and then leave. Be realistic in how much time it is going to take you to get to work or school, set your alarm to alert you that it is time to leave, and then leave.

Use a beeper that will alarm at regular intervals to get you back on task.

Many times people with ADHD get over-focused and lose track of time – another reason they are late for appointments, etc. A regular reminder will help you get back on task.

Have a tape recorder in your car.

You can record the tasks you need to do, shopping lists, or the ideas for that great next project. It's also a good time to record those things you have completed and give yourself a compliment. You can blow off steam. Instead of just thinking about a situation that made you mad or frustrated, talk about it into your recorder. When you have had time to reflect, listen to what you said, then erase it.

Structure your work or study environment.

Work in a quiet environment but not necessarily a noiseless one. Get a fan or listen to soft background music. Consistent noise often blocks out other distracting sounds. Close your door if possible. Use headphones if you are in a wide open space. If possible, face your desk away from the traffic person.

Try to do one task at a time.

Work on one file. Study one subject at a time. Clean one room. Unpack one box. Get rid of one stack. Unclutter one thing at a time.

Eat a balanced diet.

Know what is and is not ADHD.

Break a large project into smaller tasks and ADHD deadlines for completion of each step.

The whole project may seem overwhelming, but, by breaking the whole into parts, it becomes manageable. This applies to packing for a trip, cleaning the whole house, submitting a department budget, preparing for exams, etc.

Exercise

Have an exercise routine daily. Find something that you enjoy. Exercise helps work off that excess energy and aggression in a positive way – and it's good for you and your brain.

Get enough sleep.

Many people with ADHD symptoms get their second wind at 11 p.m. and they finally decide to clean out the closet, get started on that project that has been on their mind for days, complete the assignment that is due tomorrow, plan a new project. They may stay up all night to complete the task, but they may also not get up the next morning to turn it in or show up for school or work.

Use a filing system or organizer to help you structure the different tasks in your life.

Have a reward system for the goals that you have set up and accomplished.

Develop your sense of humor.

Continue to educate yourself about how the characteristics of ADHD affect your life.

Continue to read about and talk to others about this disorder. It is equally important to be an educator yourself – to help family, friends, teachers, and co-workers understand the symptoms and their impact.

Source: Educational Resources & Counseling, www.addresources.org