

Managing ADHD

Although there's no cure for ADHD, many people find that—with practice and hard work—they can manage their symptoms very effectively. A diagnosis of ADHD doesn't mean that you can't be a good partner, or have a successful career. However, your path to achieving these goals might be different than others.

Below, we'll offer solutions to challenges that people with ADHD often face. Use this tool as a starting point to think about areas where you would like to grow, and to begin generating solutions to problems.

Create Structure

More than just about anything else, the symptoms of ADHD can be tamed by structure and routine. Without structure, the obligations of a single day can become jumbled and overwhelming, or simply forgotten. A steady routine will help you focus on one thing at a time, with less room for distraction.

Set aside a time for everything. Try to eat, sleep, work, and relax at roughly the same time every day. This will help you follow through with each of your daily tasks. It might be a struggle to keep your routine at first, but with time you'll fall into a groove and it'll become second nature.

- ✓ Don't be overambitious—a realistic routine is better than a "perfect" one. For example, a few blocks of 30-minute study sessions will probably be more productive than one miserable 3-hour session.
- ✓ Prioritize big "anchor" tasks, such as sleep, meals, and work. The rest of your day will revolve around these. Attach smaller tasks to your anchors. For example: "I will go for a walk right after dinner."
- ✓ A lot of people worry that a structured day will be boring. The truth is, it's only boring if you make it that way. Work fun activities into your routine, and set aside free time so you can still be spontaneous.
- ✓ Especially when you're getting started, write things down, and set alarms. Remember to set reminders a few minutes early so you have time to prepare for each task.

Example Schedule

7 AM	12 PM	4 PM	6 PM	7 PM	8 PM	10:30 PM
wake up / get ready for day	lunch	exercise (Mon – Fri) groceries (Sun)	dinner	study for 30 minutes	relax / have fun	sleep

Set Aside Time for Relationships

Sometimes, the symptoms of ADHD can make a person come across as indifferent and uncaring in their relationships, even when that's not the case. For many, it can be hard to not interrupt, or to sit still and listen without doing other things. Others might forget birthdays and anniversaries because they're busy juggling other responsibilities. Whatever your struggle, setting aside time for your relationships can help.

If you have difficulty focusing on your partner after a long day, schedule several short periods (e.g. 5 minutes after work and before bed) where you will do nothing but listen. Set a timer, put away the phone, and give 100% of your attention. Remember, five good minutes is better than twenty bad ones. However, it's important that your partner buys into this plan first. Not many people will respond well to being put on a timer if they don't understand why!

For many couples, a simple lack of understanding can create big problems. Spend some time teaching your partner about ADHD, or encourage them to read about the condition themselves. Some therapists will be willing to meet with your partner to answer questions, provide education, and help bridge the gap.

Don't forget to maintain your relationships with those you don't see every day. Create reminders for others' special occasions, and schedule phone calls with friends and family.

Managing ADHD

Stay Organized

Clutter is the enemy of ADHD. As you move from task to task, half-finished projects will start to take over your physical and mental space. This leads to distraction, and a higher probability that things will be lost or forgotten.

- ✓ Create to-do lists. Start with the quickest and easiest items (unless there's something urgent) so you can see immediate progress.
- ✓ Keep your workspace clean. Clear your desk of everything, except for the task you're currently working on. Additionally, give yourself 5 minutes at the end of each day to tidy up.
- ✓ Downsize. Get rid of old knick-knacks, clothes, papers, and anything else you don't need around your home or office. If you've been holding onto something for 5 years because "you might need it someday", it's probably OK to part ways!
- ✓ If a task comes up that will only take 30 seconds, and you aren't doing something else important, do it right away. Now it's off your to-do list, and out of your mind forever.

Tailor Your Environment to You

What helps you concentrate, and what derails you from your work? Some people with ADHD need a lot of stimuli. They work better somewhere that's vibrant and loud. Others need the opposite: no sounds, no TVs, no phones—nothing but the task at hand. Figure out what you need, and create that environment.

Need noise and activity?

Listen to music, or turn on the TV to something that's not *too* interesting.

If you work in a humdrum office, try to liven up your personal workspace. Add photos, colors, and anything else that will keep you stimulated.

Schedule regular breaks to go for a walk. Set a timer during your break so you know when to get back to work.

Need peace and quiet?

If you work in a noisy office, use headphones to listen to white noise, or non-intrusive music.

Designate an office area in your home, even if it's just a corner, and remove all distractions.

Turn off your phone, hide your emails, and close your door. Limit all those pesky distractions that tend to pop up when you're working.

Live a Healthy Lifestyle

Exercise, nutrition, and sleep. Without these, you'll have a hard time taking control of your ADHD regardless of what other steps you take. Even someone without ADHD will become restless without exercise, and distracted without food or sleep. The detrimental effects are only magnified by ADHD.

Find a form of exercise you enjoy. Even a 30-minute walk can have a positive impact on your health. Sports are also a great outlet if you're a thrill-seeker (join a league to hold yourself accountable).

When it comes to sleep, everyone's a bit different. Eight hours a night is usually sufficient, but some people do require more. Get into a steady sleep routine, and stick to it (even on weekends).

Our knowledge about what foods help to curb the symptoms of ADHD is less clear, but many believe a diet that's high in protein, and low in sugar, can help. Nonetheless, it's important to make sure you eat several well-balanced meals every day. Planned meals double as a great way to stay in a routine.