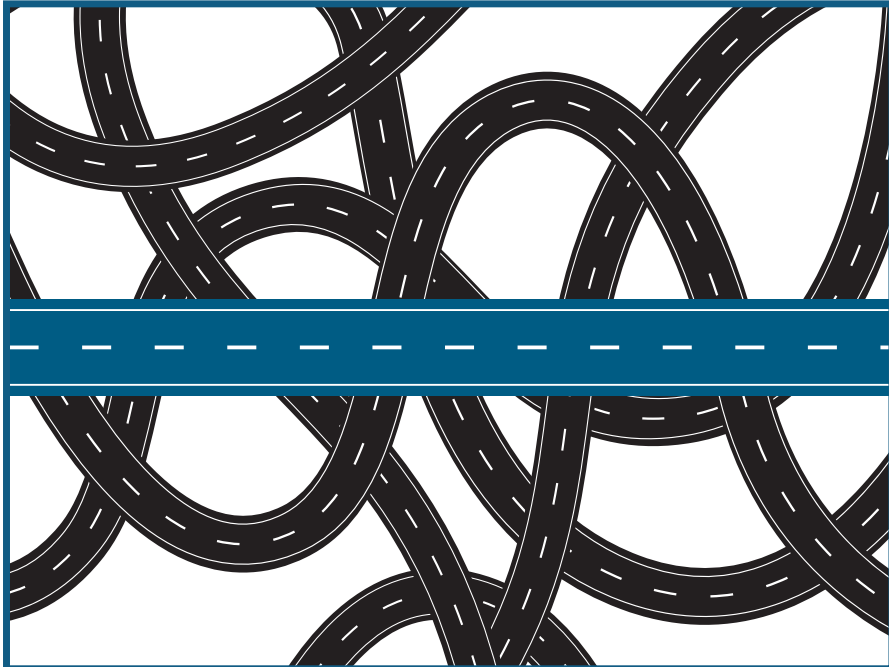


# Stop Procrastinating!

## 18 ADHD-Friendly Ways to Get Things Done



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From the ADHD Experts at

**ADDITUDE**

Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

# ADDITUDE

## Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

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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Procrastination, as we know, means willingly putting off until tomorrow what can be done today — sometimes against our better judgment. Psychosocial researchers call procrastination “preference reversal.” We choose to do the thing we would rather do.

No matter what it’s called, procrastination is part of the ADHD experience. That doesn’t mean you should beat yourself up every time you do it. The ability to focus — and stay focused — can’t be turned on like a light switch. But procrastination can be frustrating, especially if you feel like you’re letting down those around you or not living up to your own expectations. Procrastination can lead to struggles at work, fights with a partner, and lowered self-esteem as ADHDers struggle to understand why they can’t seem to do simple tasks without a fight.

Here’s how to get that procrastination monkey off your back and those chores off your to-do list. Some of these get-it-done strategies will be a better fit for you than others. See which ones work best and use them at home, the office, and in your day-to-day life.

**1. Understand the cause.** Knowing what contributes to the cycle of unproductive procrastination can help you make better choices in using time efficiently. To make wise choices in using your time, you need to ask yourself the reasons for your procrastination. Do you switch to a

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different activity because you can't stay focused, or is it because you fear you can't do a good job or you don't know how to start the project? Go through the list of things that could be contributing to procrastination, and see if you can identify your own unique cause.

**2. Set it up beforehand.** An easy way to create some momentum on a task is to gather the necessary supplies to complete the task. When it is time to start it, you're ready to go. If you need to paint the bathroom, buy the paint, brushes, and rollers, and put everything near the bathroom. The setup usually doesn't take long, but it makes it easier to jump into the task.

**3. Do something fun first.** Many people with ADHD find it helpful to do something they love first as a way to get in the mood to do less enjoyable tasks. Any stimulating activity you enjoy will do the trick. Some ADHDers play basketball or computer games. Others dance or take a bubble bath. Set a timer for 20 minutes to make sure you don't get so absorbed in the fun activity that you forget to do the necessary one!

**4. Create the right work environment.** People who have ADHD often are most productive in unconventional surroundings. Instead of wearing earplugs to ensure silence, you may find that you get more done when listening to loud music.

If you work best under pressure, but still turn in projects late or exhaust yourself by pulling all-nighters, set your own deadline for completing portions of the project. This way, you can still work under pressure to finish each portion "on time."

**5. Do tasks in clusters.** Since it takes mental effort to shift gears, it can be helpful to group several of the same kind of tasks together (sending out e-mails, making shopping lists, doing online research). This way, you can move through several items on your to-do list quickly before switching to something else.

**7. Break each task into smaller steps.** When you do this, the smaller steps aren't as intimidating and facilitate getting started. If a project can't be completed piecemeal over several days, keep up your momentum by focusing only on the next doable step. Write this step on a sticky note and post it within your line of sight.

**Stop  
Procrastinating!**  
**18 ADHD-Friendly  
Ways to Get  
Things Done**

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Put on your blinders and focus on this one step rather than on the task as a whole. When that's done, move on to the next step in the same manner. Before you know it, you'll be done.

**8. Start off with easy pieces before tackling bigger steps.** To keep your brain from getting overwhelmed by the difficult stuff, do the easy parts first. For example, doing that entire sink full of dishes — right this second? Too much. But instead of thinking, “No way, I cannot do this,” try to think, “OK, just the silverware” and then, “Since I already did that, maybe I'll do the glasses.” If you start small and keep going, you'll continue to make headway, until — to your amazement — all the dishes will be done.

**9. Use visual reminders to stay on task.** Another trick is to post a big note — if you have ADHD, a really big one — near the source of major distractions. For many of us, that's the TV or our smartphone. If you lounge around watching the tube, the note stares at you and reminds you what you should be doing. Beware, though, that you don't take such visual reminders and admonishments too far — labeling everything in the house or turning them into arts and crafts projects that eat up time you could have used productively.

**10. Create a reward for completing a task, if one doesn't exist.** Some chores don't provide a reward for completing them. Unless you're getting a big refund, sending off your tax return on time isn't much fun. Doing the laundry weekly doesn't ring anyone's bell. In such cases, invent a reward to keep you from getting bored. It could be going out to dinner or seeing a movie.

**11. Don't squander energy bursts on easy stuff.** When you feel alert and charged up, tackle more demanding tasks — either the ones that you haven't felt like doing or those that require more mental effort.

**12. Make it public.** Use social pressure in a positive way, by telling other people about your plans to accomplish something (run a 5k or clean out the attic). Knowing that we may need to answer to other people can be a tremendous motivator. Ask a friend to check in with you about a project at a certain date, so that you have created a deadline.

**Stop  
Procrastinating!**  
**18 ADHD-Friendly  
Ways to Get  
Things Done**

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## Bonus Tips: Procrastinate Productively!

You may not ever be able to fully banish procrastination from your life, but when you do, use these tips to make sure the time isn't totally wasted.

### 1. Set the Table

Accept the fact that there will be times when you are unable to concentrate. 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. Susan found that tasks that require her full attention were better planned for the morning, not the afternoon, when her meds were wearing off. She also discovered that “tying up loose ends” and getting mindless tasks done in the afternoon helped her set the stage to get focused the next morning.

Jake figured out that clearing his desk the night before starting a writing project prevented his being distracted by clutter. After he cleaned up, he got things done.

### 2. Use the Time Smartly — Even if You're Not Working

When we can't focus on a task, we get confused about how to make good use of our time. Heather, an energetic working mom, solves this dilemma by asking herself, “What is the healthiest choice I can make?” She knows that lack of exercise leads to lethargy and inefficiency, so if she can't get herself started on the chores, she goes for a walk. If he's having trouble finishing a report, Gary squeezes in some extra meditation time at his desk at work, knowing that the positive benefits of being relaxed will give him the final push he needs to finish his work — and help him interact with his team members effectively. Tonya feels better about tackling projects when she cleans out her inbox first.

### 3. Be Slow to Switch Gears

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

### 4. Surround Yourself with Positive Role Models

Christine Brady, a former *ADDitude* contributor with ADHD, 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.

#### TRY IT:

If you need external pressure to stick to a task, enlist a body double — someone who will sit with you quietly while you're working on a boring chore.

**Stop  
Procrastinating!**  
**18 ADHD-Friendly  
Ways to Get  
Things Done**

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## 5. Don't Beat Yourself Up

What we silently say to ourselves about doing the task at hand has a strong impact on how (or whether) we do it. Avoid negative self-talk, and send yourself positive, realistic messages.

Instead of saying, “This will take forever, and it’s so late already...” substitute “I might not be able to finish this today, but I can do the first two steps within the next 30 minutes.”

The messages you send yourself when you complete a task can be powerful deterrents to future procrastination. They can also diminish the guilt that procrastinators often feel about having missed appointments in the past or having turned in work that doesn’t measure up to their ability.

## 6. Look Ahead

Finally, stay optimistic and look towards the future. When you have a long list of tasks — none of which you feel like doing — think how good you’re going to feel (or how much you’ll be paid) when the task has been crossed off your list.

**Michele Novotni, Ph.D.**, is an internationally recognized expert in the field of ADHD. She has written several books on attention deficit, including *What Does Everybody Else Know That I Don’t?*

**Ari Tuckman, Psy.D., MBA**, practices in West Chester, PA, where he works with adults and adolescents with attention challenges. He lectures regularly about succeeding with ADHD.

**Sandy Maynard** is an ADHD coach and regular contributor to *ADDitude*. She lives in Washington, DC, where she operates Catalytic Coaching.

**Christine Brady**, a longtime contributor to *ADDitude*, passed away in 2011. She is deeply missed.

### DO IT:

If you’re taking ADHD medication, it’s generally best to schedule difficult tasks for times when your symptoms are fully covered.



## **ADDitude Special Reports Available Now**

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

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### **You Know You Have ADHD When...**

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

### **Smart Comebacks**

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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.

### Organizing Solutions for People with ADHD

>> <http://additu.de/org-web>

Feeling lost in the mess of “stuff”? Susan Pinsky, a professional organizer who specializes in ADHD, discusses simple steps for reducing clutter, eliminating excess from your life, and why ADHDers should aim for “good enough” instead of “perfect.” These simple, straightforward solutions will help you calm the chaos and conquer the clutter — for good.

### Healing the ADHD Brain: Interventions and Strategies that Work

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

There’s no one-size-fits-all approach for treating ADHD. Here, Daniel G. Amen, M.D., explains treatment options ranging from medication and supplements to diet and exercise.

### Survival Strategies for Moms with ADHD

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

Mothers with ADHD, especially those parenting ADHD children, often put the needs of others before themselves. Despite their good intentions, when moms leave their own ADHD untreated, the whole family can suffer. Ellen Littman, Ph.D., outlines how to let go of society’s expectations of being “perfect” and focus on your own accomplishments. After all, being a mom is a tough job!

### Smart Money Strategies for ADHD Adults

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

You don’t need to be an investment banker to make financially sound decisions. In this audio presentation hosted by Stephanie Sarkis, Ph.D., you’ll learn how executive functions affect your ability to manage money, how to avoid impulsive purchases, and more. Save, spend, budget, and plan like the pros!

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