

Coping With Adult ADD/ADHD: Top 10 Strategies

One of the keys to getting control of adult ADD/ADHD is to develop a set of compensatory strategies that help to neutralize the problems it can cause. I have found that for every challenge ADD/ADHD presents for the clients I work with, we can develop a set of strategies that can help a lot. Here are some of the strategies many of my clients find most helpful:

1. Increase structure.

Examples: organize, establish routines, develop specific goals and step-by-step plans. Utilize lists, schedules, simple systems. Prioritize tasks and things to do. Break down large projects into parts and develop a step-by-step plan.

2. Exercise.

Exercise reduces restlessness, clears the mind, improves concentration, has a calming effect, and improves mood. Take a brisk walk for 5-10 minutes periodically during the day. Exercise for longer periods (30 minutes or so) every day or every other day.

3. Take frequent breaks.

Work within your attention span. Concentrate on a task for 20-30 minutes and allow a short break to refresh and replenish. Walk around during your break.

4. Variety, novelty.

Variety and novelty help rejuvenate and sustain interest, motivation, persistence. Try to develop more variety and novelty in your life and work.

5. Planned task-shifting.

Ordinarily, shifting tasks before completion of a task is a problem for individuals with ADD because tasks don't get done. However, within a reasonable framework, you can make this natural tendency work for you. Set yourself up with 2-3 tasks and alternate between them after intervals of about a half-hour. Changing tasks can rejuvenate your concentration, etc. Example: alternate between paperwork (½ hour) and errands (½ hour). Or when you have a lot of reading, alternate between two books.

6. Modify your work environment.

Do what you can to minimize distractions. Find a quieter place to work. Try changing locations periodically. Reduce clutter.

7. Do concentration-intensive work at peak hours.

Determine what time of day (i.e. morning, afternoon, evening, etc.) your ability to concentrate is strongest. Plan to do work that requires concentration during this time of day, and schedule work that requires less concentration during periods of the day when your ability to concentrate is not as good.

8. Anti-impulsivity self-statements.

Develop catchy phrases to say to yourself to help you refrain from impulsive action. Repeat them to yourself vigorously in key situations. Examples: “be careful”, “don’t rush this”, “take your time”, “slow down”, “don’t make a hasty decision”, “take a step back, think, and then decide”, “think before you act.”

9. Don’t rush into decisions.

Put important decisions “on the back burner” for a while, for further reflection. Example: instead of buying something expensive on impulse, get yourself to delay for awhile and walk around the mall some more. You can come back and buy it if it still seems like a good idea.

10. “Stop, think, make a plan.”

In key situations, catch yourself, slow down, think (“what will happen if I . . .”) before acting. Inhibit “knee-jerk” reactions. Train yourself to think before you act, using these three steps: 1. Stop—catch yourself; 2. think—about possible actions and about potential consequences; 3. make a plan to deal with the situation.

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