

The Daily Routine That Works for Adults with ADHD



From the ADHD Experts at

ADDITUDE

Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

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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.

ADDitudeMag.com

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The Daily Routine That Works for Adults with ADHD

Keys-wallet-phone. It's our get-out-the-door mantra, and it really works. Here are more schedules, routines, and systems that, when practiced religiously, help to keep our days humming along.

BY THE EDITORS OF ADDITUDE

Children with ADHD thrive when they stick close to daily routines and schedules. This is hardly news, but it might surprise you to learn the same is true for adults with attention deficit.

The fact is, the most organized, on-time people you know all have one thing in common: They do the same tasks in the same order, each and every day. We wouldn't blame you for mistaking unmovable daily routines for boring tedium — especially if you thrive on the new and the novel. But the results speak for themselves: Set up reliable routines for the more mundane aspects of your life – getting ready for work, making dinner, getting to bed on time – and you'll free up important time to enjoy the rest of your life, without feeling guilty about putting off the laundry or oversleeping again. Here is how to do it.

How to Build a Routine

The goal of any good routine is to make certain behavior patterns into habits that you practice until they become second nature. It takes a few weeks (or months) of everyday use for any action to become internalized. In the meantime, use these steps to create and stick to your new routines.

1. **Post the steps of your routine where you can see them.** If you want to prepare lunch before bed, put a list on the refrigerator. If you

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want to lay out your clothes the night before, post a reminder on your bathroom mirror where you can't ignore it.

2. **Set a watch or phone alert** to go off five minutes before you're scheduled to begin a new task. That will give you time to finish whatever you are working on, and refocus. You may also need reminders to help you stay on track.
3. **Set a day to start over.** If you fall off on your routine because of vacation, a houseguest, or an unexpected event like an illness, mark a day on the calendar when you'll pick up where you left off. You don't have to be perfect every day to make a difference in your life.
4. **Start small.** If creating a whole new life routine at once feels like too much, pick one small thing – like making the bed or sorting the mail – that will make your day easier when done regularly. Figure out an easy way to do it. Will you throw out junk mail immediately instead of dropping it in a pile? Will you open bills and put them with your keys so you remember to pay them the next day? When you consistently do this for two weeks, add another tiny thing. Before you know it your larger routine will change.
5. **Don't give up.** If you have a hard time with a part of your routine, try doing it a different way. More often than not, just a tiny tweak can make a difference. If you can't seem to plan your meals on Sunday night, for example, try Tuesday evenings when the grocery store is empty.

“You won't get it 100 percent right every time. But you'll be better off than you were before.”

***—Dana Rayburn,
ADHD Coach***

Morning

The AM hours are not often our favorite time of day. We're naturally night owls, and can have trouble falling sleep, so dragging ourselves out of bed in the morning is a chore.

But how you start the morning can set the tone for your entire day. If you are constantly rushing into work a few minutes late, you don't have time to stop, think, and focus on priorities. You're harried, stressed, and flustered.

Instead, use these steps to bring a little peace to your morning.

1. **Get up 15 minutes before anyone else.** Sure, it's the last thing in the world you want to do, but having a small space of time can let you shower, dress, and have a cup of coffee before you have to toast anyone's bagel or brush anyone's hair.
2. **Invest in a good alarm clock.** Try one of our ADHD-approved

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devices like Clocky that will force you out of bed to chase it, or the SonicBomb that vibrates your mattress.

3. **Open the shades.** As soon as you get out of the bed, let natural light into the room, or if it's dark when you go to bed, leave the curtains parted so the sun can nudge you into waking up.
4. **Set a time to leave the house, and announce it.** Start with what time you need to be to work, or drop the kids off at school. Work backward with how long it takes to get there, load everyone into the car, and get on the road.
5. **Build in an extra 15 minutes** in case something goes wrong. Being early is not a bad thing if everything goes as planned. It lets you start the day on a calm note, and avoid rushing and forgetting.
6. **Don't turn on the TV or computer.** Even if you just plan to catch the day's weather report, it's easy to get interested in a program and lose track of time.
7. **Consider an early morning dose of medication.** If you take an ADHD medication, ask your doctor about taking a minimal dose of short-acting medication before you need to get out of bed, and then resting until your second alarm goes off. This dose should supplement your regular morning pills.
8. **Keep your weekend routine the same.** It's tempting to stay up late and sleep in on Saturdays and Sundays, but it only makes it harder to get back on track when Monday inevitably rolls around

Wake up! ADHD-Friendly Alarm Clocks
<http://attitu.de/ce>

SAMPLE MORNING ROUTINE

6:30 am – Wake up

6:35 am – Get ready: Shower, get dressed, make coffee

7:05am – Wake up your kids/spouse

7:15am – Breakfast time

7:45am – Brush your teeth

7:55am – Pick up everything at your launch pad

8:00am – Out the door!

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At Work

Being productive at work means managing time, setting priorities, and resisting the distractions that make us forget what we were trying to do.

Stay on task with these routines, and a few ground rules.

1. **Use the first 15 minutes of the day as a planning period.** Look at your to-do list to figure out the Top 5 most important things to complete by the end of the day. Mark timeslots on your calendar to work on each thing. Set a timer when you tackle each task to remind you when it's time to change to the next item. Use a dry-erase board so you can update your list throughout the day as your priorities change.
2. **Schedule the bigger, harder tasks for the morning** when you have the most attention. Break them into manageable chunks you can work on throughout the day. Leave smaller, easier-to-accomplish tasks for the afternoon, when you are tired.
3. **Don't check your email first thing.** Instead of setting your own priorities, this makes you react to what other people need. Check email after you have created a plan for the day and know when you have free time.
4. **Schedule times to check email.** Constantly checking it whenever a new message pops into your inbox can distract you from the task you are working on and make it hard to get anything done. Instead, respond to emails in groups at 10 am, 1 pm, 3 pm, and before leaving for the day.
5. **Bring in a fidget.** Doing two things at once can help focus the ADHD brain on a primary task. A stress ball or Bucky balls can help keep your mind focused on desk work while your hands move. Or, listen to music in your headphones while you work to keep your mind engaged.
6. **Replace negative self-talk.** Instead of thinking, "This will take forever, and it's already late..." think, "I might not be able to finish this today, but in the next hour, I can do the first two steps so there is not as much tomorrow." This approach can diminish procrastination and guilt.
7. **Just do it.** Even if your first try is sloppy and needs lots of revision, it is better than a blank document. Instead of worrying that your first draft isn't perfect, just start capturing thoughts and go from there. Often once you get started, momentum will carry you on.

**Free Resource:
ADHD Career Success
Guide**

<http://attitu.de/career>

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SAMPLE WORK ROUTINE

9:00am – Review your tasks for the day. Create a schedule to tackle the top 5.

9:15am – Task 1

10:00am – Check email

10:15am – Task 2

11:00am – Activity Break! Walk up and down a few flights of stairs or get a glass of water and do a crossword puzzle

11:15am – Task 3

12:00pm – Lunch

1:00pm – Check email

1:15pm – Task 4

2:00pm – Talk a short walk, and clear your desk of loose papers

2:15pm – Task 5

3:00pm – Check email

3:15pm – Work on small, easy tasks

4:45pm – Check email

5:00pm – Head home. Check to make sure you have everything you need before leaving your desk.

Free Resource:
Eat Healthier, Feel Better
<http://additu.de/10j>

Dinner

At times, dinnertime feels like a three-ring circus with kids demanding snacks, art projects cluttering the dinner table, or a last-minute rush to the grocery store. Avoid all of that with these strategies.

Meal planning can seem like a chore – decision-making, planning, prioritizing, and then navigating the supermarket. Instead, think of it as an exercise in creativity – figuring out what you can make from the ingredients in your home, or getting the most meals out of one common ingredient.

1. **Plan out meals for the week.** Before going grocery shopping, sit down and figure out what you want to eat for breakfasts, lunches, and dinners

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throughout the week. Gather recipes and make a list of things to buy. Put it on your launch pad, and when you get to the grocery store, only buy things that are on the list.

2. **Create a “Top 10” dinner list.** You can use these recipes in 5-day cycles over two weeks. It allows for some variety, and a couple nights of ordering in or eating out without getting bored eating the same thing.
3. **Write your menus on individual index cards.** Put these in a sequence, so you have the recipe and ingredients handy when you are ready to start cooking. Arrange them in an order that allows you to use leftover ingredients from one meal to start the next day’s dinner.
4. **Prep foods the night before, or when you get home from the grocery store.** If you will be using fresh vegetables, rinse and chop them before putting them away. Toss ingredients in a slow cooker that you can turn on in the morning so that dinner is halfway there before the evening rush. Take out frozen ingredients for tomorrow’s dinner when you’re making dinner tonight.
5. **Involve your family.** If you have kids or a spouse, ask them to set the table while you finish up cooking. Or, have them clear the table and load the dishwasher when dinner is over.
6. **Cook in double.** If you double a recipe, you can freeze portions to eat on a free night, or on a night when you’re just too busy to cook.

“The brilliance lies in having the mundane aspects of life taken care of, so you can relax and have some fun. Isn’t that what we all want?” – Marla Cilley, The FLY Lady

SAMPLE DINNER ROUTINE

5:45 pm – Start food prep

6:30 pm – Set the table, and pour beverages

6:45 pm – Dinner is served

7:15 pm – Clear the table and load the dishwasher

7:30 pm – Relax and do something you enjoy

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Bedtime

After a long day at work, many adults with ADHD are wound-up, and can't turn off their racing brains by the time lights-out rolls around. The key is to start planning to go to bed long before the clock chimes 10. A reliable and consistent pattern can help you reset your mind to get ready for sleep each night, and wake up physically and mentally refreshed.

An organized morning begins the night before, and here is what it looks like:

1. **Lay out your clothes for tomorrow.** Set a timer, and turn picking out an outfit into a fun game. Pick out every little bit you need right down to underwear, socks, accessories, and shoes.
2. **Create a “launch pad.”** Designate an area by the front door where you place everything you need to bring with you when you walk out to your car each day. Place briefcases, purses, keys, and dry cleaning receipts all together there. It gives you a place to put things you need, saves time running around looking for what you need, and cuts down on morning panic/forgotten items.
3. **Set the stage for breakfast.** Fill the coffee pot and program it to brew while you're getting dressed. Place a clean mug next to it, and set the table with any dishes you'll need and any unrefrigerated food items.
4. **Prepare your lunch.** If you bring lunch to work, put it in a container ready to grab and take to work. If you buy lunch, make sure you have enough cash to pay for it.
5. **Log off the computer,** put your phone away, and turn off the TV an hour before bed. Studies show that using electronic devices wakes the brain up instead of preparing it for sleep, and the light they emit can disrupt circadian rhythms. Try a quiet activity like reading.
6. **Get kids into bed,** or at least ready for bed and in their rooms, an hour before you want to go to sleep. You need some off-duty time to rest and wind down before conking out for the night.
7. **Take a hot bath or shower.** In the evening, you won't feel so rushed to get out the door, and there's a lower chance someone else will need the bathroom. When your temperature gradually drops, it helps you to feel sleepy. It's a great natural relaxing agent.
8. **Go to bed!** Prioritize getting eight hours of sleep each night. Catching enough Zzzzs is essential for anyone with ADHD.

**ADHD Bedtime Rituals:
The Do's and Don'ts of
Sleep**
<http://attitu.de/1k>

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SAMPLE BEDTIME ROUTINE

9:00pm – Put away electronic devices

9:05pm – Lay out clothes

9:15pm – Get breakfast and lunch ready

9:30pm – Take a shower or a relaxing bath

9:50pm – Brush teeth

10:00pm – Get in bed and read quietly for half an hour

**What a Nightmare!
More on Common Sleep
Problems**
<http://additu.de/29>

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ADDitude Special Reports Available Now

www.adhdreports.com

ADHD 101

A complete overview of ADHD, outlining every step from diagnosis to treatment—all the way to living successfully with attention deficit.

From the moment you suspect ADHD in yourself or your child, you have hundreds of questions. Which doctors can evaluate symptoms? What medication side effects should you be prepared for? Can diet help? This comprehensive eBook has over 100 pages of expert advice, personal stories, and more to help you become an ADHD expert.

>> Learn More About This Special Report: <http://additu.de/adhd-101>

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.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/related>

Mindfulness and Other Natural Treatments

The best non-medical treatments for ADHD, including exercise, green time, and mindful meditation.

Learn how mindfulness works on ADHD brains, and how to begin practicing it today. Plus, research the benefits of other alternative treatments like yoga and deep breathing exercises—including some designed especially for kids—as well as the science behind each natural therapy.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/mindfulness>

To purchase these or other ADDitude Special Reports, go to www.adhdreports.com

FREE ADDitude Downloadable Booklets

Does Your Child Have a Learning Disability?

Use this self-test to find out if your child's problems at school may be due to LD.

Is It Depression?

Depression is a serious mood disorder, but it's not always easy to recognize.

Who Can Treat ADHD?

Doctor? Psychiatrist? Coach? Learn who can treat your attention deficit.

You Know You Have ADHD When...

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

Is It Adult ADHD?

Habitually disorganized? Always running late? It could be ADHD.

Homework Help for ADHD Children

Addressing homework problems is critical – here's how to do it.

Smart Comebacks

Witty responses to ADHD doubters.

Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:

<http://additu.de/freedownloads>

FREE ADHD Webinar Replays from ADDitude:

Neurofeedback and Cognitive Training for ADHD Kids

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

Is brain training—including neurofeedback and cognitive training (CT)—really all it's cracked up to be? Is it safe for kids? Is it worth the money? Naomi Steiner, M.D., shares the research behind some computer-based alternative therapies so you can make an informed decision before treating your child.

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.

The Truth About Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

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

There are lots of misconceptions surrounding OCD and ADHD, especially when the conditions coexist. In this webinar, host Roberto Olivardia, Ph.D., sets the record straight about this potentially debilitating condition. Learn the truth about obsessive-compulsive disorder, so you (or your child) can get the right diagnosis and receive the proper treatment.

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.

Mastering ADHD Medications

>> <http://additu.de/22>

Dr. William Dodson, a board-certified adult psychiatrist who specializes in treating ADHD, discusses the many medication options for ADHD and how each one works. Learn about choosing a medication, minimizing side effects, and finding the right dosage for yourself or your child.

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/email>

Adult ADHD and LD (weekly)

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

Parenting ADHD and LD Children (weekly)

Strategies and support for parents on behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, and making friends.

ADHD and LD at School (bimonthly; weekly from August through October)

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

Treating ADHD (weekly)

Treatment options for attention deficit including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies.