

# MANAGING LIFE WITH ADHD

*TEN STRATEGIES TO ORGANIZE YOUR TIME, YOUR STUFF, AND YOUR LIFE*



Brenda Nicholson, ADD Moms

# MANAGING YOUR LIFE WITH ADHD

*TEN STRATEGIES TO ORGANIZE YOUR TIME, YOUR STUFF, AND YOUR LIFE*

## THANK YOU

Thank you for subscribing to my newsletter. I try to send out something on a regular basis, but I make no promises, except that you most likely will never feel as though I am emailing you too much.

This e-book is my gift to you. I hope that you will find it helpful in managing your life with ADHD.

All of the ideas expressed in this book are meant as helpful suggestions; none are guaranteed. The work is up to you. 😊

*Brenda*

Copyright 2009

ADD Moms

## MANAGING YOUR LIFE

Having Attention Deficit Disorder can make even the simplest things seem tough.

Over the years, I've found a number of strategies and techniques that help me feel like I'm in control most of the time.

This book highlights the top ten, in no particular order.

In addition to these tips, I've found that there are a few basic habits you should get into that will make a big difference in your life:

- Try to get enough sleep as much as possible
- Get up early enough to start your day – no pushing the snooze
- Take a shower and get dressed before you start your day
- Drink plenty of water
- Exercise
- Take good care of yourself – treat yourself at least as well as you treat others

# NUMBER 1

## *YOU NEED AN ASSISTANT*

A good assistant helps you stay organized and on time and always keeps track of vital information. You need a good assistant.

Your assistant will look an awful lot like a day planner, a PDA, or even your cell phone.

I personally prefer electronics over paper for a number of reasons:

- Every page in a paper planner has the ability to fall out
- Paper planners invite the use of sticky notes and random bits of paper stuffed here and there
- Paper planners are often heavy and complicated to set up
- Electronic planners keep all of your information in a small, easy to carry package
- Electronic planners have the ability to beep at you and remind you of an appointment
- Most electronic planners have the ability to sync with your computer, giving you another copy of your information just in case
- Electronic planners can hold tremendous amounts of information
- Most planners have a search feature or some other way to easily find what you need
- Electronic planners are just as affordable as paper ones

My electronic planner is an iPod Touch. It's just like the iPhone, but without the phone capabilities. It literally goes everywhere with me, even from room to room in the house.

I have made it a habit to put everything in it, including information like where I put something I'll need later, like tickets to an event. The last time we moved, I itemized the contents of every box on my Palm Pilot. It made unpacking and finding what we needed a lot easier.

Now I know that some of you are thinking that you're a paper person; that you don't like electronic gadgets. If you're currently using a paper planner, and it's working for you, great. If it's not doing the job, though, you may want to consider some sort of electronic device.

If you have a cell phone, and you take it with you everywhere, maybe that would be a good option for you. Almost all cell phones have at least a calendar and an alarm feature. Trust me, I have the oldest cell phone on the planet and mine has those capabilities.

If you're good at texting, you've already got the skills to add your appointments, etc into it.

Why don't you give it a try for a week or two? Make a habit of putting your appointments into your cell phone calendar and set an alarm to remind you. Add in a few other things, too, like maybe a reminder to buy a birthday card or pick up milk on the way home.

I bet you'll never go back to paper again.

## NUMBER 2

### *EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY*

Now that I've got you considering the use of an electronic planning system, I'm going to push you a little bit further.

There are all sorts of free resources online that can help you manage your time, get organized, and remember what you need. Here are a few of my favorite sites or ideas:

[Jott](#) is a free service that sends emails or text messages to anyone you want, just by making a phone call or logging into their site. If I have a great idea while I'm driving and don't have a way to write it down, I call Jott, record my idea, and have it emailed to me. I can text or email someone else too.

[Netvibes](#) is a new site I've started using, and it's also free. They have all sorts of widgets that you can put on your pages – one public page, one private. The to-do widget is very popular, and you could use the wall on your public page as a way for your family to check in with each other.

Online banking and online bill pay – priceless! I pay every bill I can in one of two ways: online or automatic withdrawal. It makes the whole process so much simpler and easier, and quick, too, if you forgot a bill and need to pay it last minute.

[The B Word](#) is the best budgeting and financial management system I've ever used. It's simple, easy to understand, and it makes the whole budgeting

process less painful. It's affordable (\$34.95) and the owner, Lee Roesner, offers excellent and prompt support.

Did you know that there are free websites that will plan a week's worth of meals for you that are healthy and easy to make? You can even find others that will look for the best bargains at the stores you shop at and create your list from there. [Menus for Moms](#) is one I like.

While you're online, there are lots of sites that offer you help in getting organized. Some charge fees and some don't. Check out [Flylady](#), [Get Organized Now](#), and [Red Letter Day Professional Organizing](#).

Red Letter Day has some great tips, and if you live in Michigan, you might consider hiring Deb. I've worked with her before and I know she understands ADD.

[Rescue Time](#) is a very intriguing site I've just discovered. It helps you see how you're managing your time, what you're paying attention to, and how productive you are. And, it's free!

## NUMBER 3

### *MAKE IT A HABIT*

Habits and routines are the foundations for ordering your life. They put you on automatic, and as a result, you get things done without thinking about them.

Do you forget to brush your teeth, or take a shower, or have that first cup of coffee in the morning? Of course not.

You can start with habits like these and then add on a new behavior to make into a habit.

Here's an example: I was always forgetting to take my cholesterol medication in the morning rush out the door. I moved the prescription bottle from the kitchen to my bathroom drawer, and then it was easy to remember to take it when I brushed my teeth. *Note: I remember to take my allergy medication at night with an alarm on my cell phone.*

Start by taking a look at what you want to accomplish. Make it simple; break it down into smaller steps if you have to. Then try to find a habit or behavior that might tie into that. For instance, if you are always losing your keys, think about where you are when you have them in your hand as well as where you find them. For our family, a basket near the front door does the trick.

## NUMBER 4

### *SIMPLIFY*

Paring down your possessions to what you really need and use can make your life drastically different. I'm not suggesting you live like a monk, but by eliminating the excess in your home and wardrobe, you could make so much in your life easier.

Streamline your wardrobe for work, almost like a uniform. You could wear pants, a blouse and a jacket everyday to work and still look different each day and attractive. A few accessories can make a big difference.

No? Well, at the very least, lay out your clothes the night before.

Make a master template for your meals. Every Sunday might be a roast, for instance, and some kind of pasta on Mondays. Go one step further and think of 4 different versions of pasta and you've got Mondays planned for a month.

The next step, of course, is to make a master grocery list, using the stuff you buy all the time and whatever you need for your meals.

You could use the master template idea for work, too. Do you have certain things you do every week, or at certain times of the year? If you map out your days well enough, it will really increase your productivity and efficiency.

## NUMBER 5

### *PREPARE AHEAD*

The holidays come at the same time every year. So do birthdays. I bet even your work schedule is pretty predictable.

If you know its coming, why don't you get ready for it ahead of time? (Yeah, I'm still out shopping on Christmas eve, too.)

There are free reminder services online that will help you remember things like birthdays, and elaborate planned lists that will get you through the holidays. There are lists for cleaning, decorating the house, and menu planning.

And how much better would your mornings be if you woke up to clothes laid out the night before, the table set for breakfast and lunches packed, and everything you need to take with you waiting by the door?

All it takes is a little pre-planning, some time and follow through.

## NUMBER 6

### *HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE?*

People with Attention Deficit Disorder are notoriously poor judges of time. They under or over estimate how long things will take and they lose track of time easily.

There are a number of things that you can do to get a better handle on your time, but for most of us, it will take some work.

Start by getting a stop watch and an analog clock. You probably have a stop watch on your cell phone. An analog clock is one with hands, not a digital one.

Put the clock anywhere you tend to waste too much time. You can even put one on your computer desktop – I have one on mine.

An analog clock is a very visual reminder of what time it is, how much time has passed, and how much is left. A digital clock requires you to do math to figure that out.

You're going to use the stop watch to find out how long things really take. Start it and get into the shower or drive to work or whatever. Don't make it a race, just do it normally.

It's even more effective if you have an idea ahead of time of how much time you think it takes.

You'll find that you were right on some things, and way off on others.

Knowing how long things take allows you to make a more realistic plan for your day and to avoid the late arrivals and rushing around.

It also serves as motivation for when you've got a task to do that you don't want to do. For instance, sometimes when my kitchen is trashed, I just don't want to face it. But I know that, even at its worst, it can usually be straightened up in 20 minutes or less. And knowing that almost always motivates me to do it.

Keep track of how long things take in your planner until you have them firmly fixed in your head. And always allow a little extra just in case. If you're completing a long term project or something complicated, I would double the amount of time you think you'll need. If you get done early, you can just relax and enjoy.

## NUMBER 7

### *THE STUFF*

Organizing our stuff is a big deal to people with Attention Deficit Disorder. First of all, we have so much of it. (And most of it is laying around, sort of in plain view. At least that was the intent.)

We leave it out so we can see it and know where it is. But after the 32nd thing has been left out, it all gets lost in a plain old mess.

You need to start by simplifying your possessions; paring down what you have. Did I say that already? Isn't it great how this all works together?

Here are the rules for that, especially if you're feeling overwhelmed:

- Start anywhere – just start
- Work on a time frame rather than how much you get done (clean for 15 minutes, not until the room is done)
- Map out one section of the room and just work on that – the desk, maybe, or the closet floor
- Have garbage bags ready for trash and containers to hold things you're getting rid of
- If you're having trouble making decisions, or you want to keep everything you might want to consider professional help
- Take a break every 15 minutes, or just stop then
- Take pride in what you've done so far
- Ask for help if you need it

Once things get sorted out and eliminated, you can begin to organize whats left. Here are some general rules for that:

- Store things together in a way that makes sense – paper with pencils, hats with gloves, etc
- Put things in containers as much as possible – one basket holding all of your scrapbook supplies or the stuff from your pants pockets
- Get attractive containers that can be a decorative touch to store things you need often – cell phone, keys and gloves, for instance
- See through containers or color coded ones are good for storage in closets or areas where they won't be seen
- Label your containers – none should say miscellaneous!
- Order in the containers is unnecessary as long as you are storing like things – you will gladly dump a basket full of scarves on the table to find the right one and then putting the rest away is easy
- Hang as many of your clothes as possible – easier to see and find
- Put things where it makes sense for them to be – a basket of shoes by the back door, for instance
- Make a note in your planner of anything you store that you might need help finding – you may need to find a way to identify the particular container, either by labeling it or numbering it
- Get in the habit of putting away what you get out and encourage your family to do the same
- Get in the habit of doing things along the way – you don't have to wait for enough of the kids clothes to make a load to wash them – wash all of Monday and Tuesdays clothes together no matter who they belong to

## NUMBER 8

### *IF ITS TUESDAY...*

Some things happen over and over again on a regular basis. You see your dentist every 6 months and you get your hair cut every 4-6 weeks.

Here are two ideas to make those kinds of events easier to remember:

1. Make your next appointment when you are leaving – and then put it in your planner with an alarm reminder
2. Pick a day that's good for you and stick to it – every 5th Saturday I get my hair cut and every other Tuesday I clean out the car

You can use these ideas for all kinds of things, not just appointments.

When my kids were little, family birthday celebrations always happened on Sunday; before or after the actual day depended on which day of the week the birthday occurred.

Garbage day at our house is on Monday, so Sunday is the day I empty all the bathroom trash and clean the litter box.

You could pick one day of the week and make it your errand day; if anyone needs anything, that's the day you'll pick it up. Get the idea?

Now combine that idea with menu planning - errand day means a quick meal or a slow cooker one - something easy on the cook.

Or add a household cleaning schedule to this plan - if you do heavy cleaning on Mondays, then dinner should be easy, like a crockpot meal.

See how this is falling together? So if Mondays are heavy cleaning, and Thursdays are errand days, then both days are quick easy meals. If you're planning your meals, and you make a roast every Sunday, then Monday or Thursday might be leftovers.

## NUMBER 9

### *GET SOME GOOD TOOLS*

By tools, I don't mean hammers and saws, unless that's part of your life.

What I mean are things you use every day to get through your day.

What gives you trouble when you're out and about? Are you one of those women frantically digging through her purse looking for her keys or credit card?

Or maybe you carry a briefcase or diaper bag that's so messy it's impossible to find anything in it. Worse yet, maybe you're a sales person working out of your (messy) car.

Find a purse or a good briefcase that has the pockets, compartments, and structure you need to make it work for you. If it works and works well, it's worth the cost.

Put some boxes or bins with hanging file folders in your car to organize it.

Do you find yourself without a pen when you need one? Sometimes an electronic organizer can record what you need. Then go to Costco or Sam's Club and stock up on pens.

Do you have the tools you need to make dinner? Are the knives sharp? If they are, then do another thing to keep things running smoothly. Do all of your chopping before you start dinner, not while you're cooking it. It makes the process much easier.

Your employer wouldn't think of putting you to work without the proper tools and equipment. Give yourself the luxury of having what you need when and where you need it. It will make your days easier and more productive.

## NUMBER 10

### *TAKE CARE OF YOU*

All of the ideas in this book and in anybody else's book aren't going to help you if you don't take care of yourself. ADD symptoms worsen when you aren't feeling your best.

You have to take care of the basics:

Get enough sleep – remember the time exercise? You know when you go to bed, but how long before you fall asleep? Count sleeping time, not in bed time.

Eat food that's good for you – you know what healthy food looks like. (See [Med Free with ADD](#) for a lifestyle plan especially for ADHD)

Drink plenty of water

Exercise regularly

Get outside every day

Take medication if you think it helps

Learn some calming techniques for when you're stressed

Learn to recognize when you're not at your best and cut back for the day as much as you can

I know these are really simple things that you hear all the time, but they really do make a difference. Don't neglect the basics.

## NUMBER 11

*GET EDUCATED*

OK – so you got a bonus cause I sort of included #10 at the front of the book.

Learning and continuing to learn all you can about Attention Deficit Disorder will do nothing but help.

A good place to start is at my sites:

[ADD Moms](#)

[ADD Student](#)

Once you're there, check out the links to other sites about ADD. Some I especially like are:

[ADHD Family Online](#)

[ADDitude Magazine](#)

[LD Online](#)

And you know, you can always [ask me!](#)

*Brenda*