

Published on ADDitudeMag.com

The Procrastinator's Guide to Getting Things Done

Do you put off starting important projects until it becomes painful? Whether you're terrified of letting someone down or you just can't get your thoughts in order, here are straightforward strategies to help ADHD adults start — and finish — even the toughest projects.

by Sandy Maynard, Michele Novotni, Ph.D., and the ADDitude editors

Difficulties Getting Started

You have a big project coming up. But it seems overwhelming, and like many ADHDers, you've been putting off getting started for days, or even months. Knowing that others see failure to complete projects on time as a sign of disrespect, incompetence, or even laziness fuels your anxiety, **fear of failure**, imperfection, and indecisiveness, making it even harder to break through the paralysis. There's hope! Cognitive behavior techniques can help even the chronic procrastinator.

Know That You Can't Do Everything Perfectly!

Stop the negative self-talk! Think of positive, realistic things you can say to yourself to stay motivated. Write down "positive affirmations" and keep them nearby. For example: "I'm going to feel great when I hand this in to my boss on time." Or, simply, "I can do this!" Instead of saying "This will take forever," say "I might not finish this today, but I can do the first two steps within the next 30 minutes." What we silently say to ourselves about doing the task at hand has a strong impact on how (or whether) we do it.

Create the Right Environment

Create the workspace that's right for you. Some ADHDers get more done when listening to loud music. Others need clutter-free, distraction-free zones -- many ADHD college students go straight to the library, not their chaotic dorm room. If **noise distracts you**, noise-reducing headphones can be a lifesaver. If your racing thoughts are distracting, putting them on paper can banish them from your mind. Lock your door. Put your phone on silent. Do what works for you.

Set Up the Task

Before even starting the project, give yourself the task of collecting everything you'll need in one place -- papers, graphs, directions from the boss -- and place it in your inbox, on your desk, or on your chair. For *ADDitude* blogger Stacey Turis, this includes a cup of green tea and a square of dark chocolate. The setup doesn't take long, but it makes it much easier to jump into the task.

Break Big Projects Up

Break projects into smaller projects, and **assign a deadline** for completing each step. Most of the time, we're given a deadline for the date by which the entire project has to be completed. To keep yourself on track, mark the date by which you should complete one-quarter of the project, one-half, and so on. Those dates will alert you to problems while there's still time to play catch-up.

Post Your Deadlines

Post deadlines for each step of your project where you can see them. This will remind you to use your time wisely. When ADHD coach Sandy Maynard was struggling to finish her long-delayed thesis, she created a computer screensaver that read "February 26 or Bust."

Do the Fun Stuff First

To get started, many people with ADHD find that once their brain is both relaxed and active, they can transfer that positive involvement to begin a daunting project. So, light up your brain by going for a walk, listening to music or practicing breathing exercises or short meditations. You can also just start with the project's fun stuff. Set a timer for fifteen minutes if you are worried about getting lost in the fun zone.

Start Somewhere, Start Anywhere

After your project is broken into small pieces, you face the moment when you have to start. Set a timer for fifteen minutes and tell yourself that you can do anything for fifteen minutes. Even if your first completed work is a bit sloppy, hey, at least you're moving! Half the time, you'll get in a groove and be ready to move forward with the next steps.

Make It Public

Knowing that we need to answer to other people can be a tremendous motivator. Ask a friend to call you at a prearranged time to make sure you're sticking to your deadlines. It's okay to ask for help -- that's what friends are for, right? You can return the favor later on when she needs a boost.

Beware of Multitasking

You know what they say, "Out of sight, out of mind." Only have on your desk what you're currently working on and **don't try to multitask**. If you absolutely must work on two projects at a time, don't bounce back and forth haphazardly. Stop the first project at a point where you can easily pick up, and shift your focus completely to the second task.

Copyright © 1998 - 2015 New Hope Media LLC. All rights reserved.

Want a free issue of ADDITUDE magazine?

<https://secure.palmcoastd.com/pcd/eSv?iMagId=09201&i4Ky=IU5A>