

# Sustaining Attention

Trying to focus with ADHD can feel like watching TV with a broken remote, the channels keep changing on their own! Sometimes the TV gets stuck and that's when hours vanish in a hyperfocus spiral.

It's not that ADHD brains lack attention, they often have too much or struggle to regulate where they place their attention. The challenge is directing it where you want it. Here are some simple, realistic ways that may help.

## 1. Break Big Tasks Down

Big projects can feel overwhelming and lead to struggles with task initiation (procrastination).

Split tasks into smaller, clear steps

Set mini deadlines

Prioritise using a "traffic light" system – red for urgent, green for low priority

## 2. Take Regular Breaks

Short breaks help you reset and reduce overwhelm. Try the following:

- Listening to music
- Stretching or walking
- Breathing exercises
- Grabbing a drink or snack
- Set a timer so breaks don't stretch too long.

## 3. Keep a Thought Dump

When your mind wanders, jot distractions down in a notebook or notes app. You can revisit them later, this keeps you focused and helps you remember important thoughts.

#### **4. Try Body Doubling**

Work alongside someone, in person or online.

Their calm presence helps you stay on task and boosts motivation.

#### **5. Use Tools and Reminders**

External supports help free up mental space. Some examples include:

- Phone alarms and calendar reminders
- Sticky notes or a whiteboard
- Keeping a short daily to-do list
- Productivity apps like Tiimo, Forest or Habitica

#### **6. Move or Fidget**

Small movements help ADHD brains stay alert. Try doodling, chewing gum, knitting, using fidget toys or squeezing a stress ball, whatever helps you focus without distraction.

#### **7. Make It Fun**

Turn chores or tasks into a game - race the clock, earn points, or set small rewards. Apps like Finch and Habitica make everyday tasks more motivating.

#### **8. Create a Focus-Friendly Environment**

You can't control your brain's chemistry, but you can certainly have a say in determining your work surroundings. The following tips may help you optimise your environment for focused work:

- Use noise-cancelling headphones
- Mute unnecessary notifications
- Keep your workspace tidy
- Put your phone out of reach

Experiment until you find what works best for you.

## 9. Look After Yourself

Sleep, food, movement and rest all effect focus. If you're constantly tired, overwhelmed or foggy, that's a sign to slow down and care for your body and mind.

- Schedule exercise into your routine to increase your mental alertness and productivity
- Set an alarm for bedtime to encourage an earlier time for sleep
- Think about diet and eating, set alarms for regular meal times, find easy recipes with healthy ingredients

Energy Accounting and Spoon Theory may help you figure out what drains you and what replenishes you

### Overcoming distraction

People with ADHD often find it hard to tune out sensory information, which means that are easily distracted by outside sensory information, or even their own thoughts.

#### *Distraction by noise*

- Listen to music (without lyrics to mask out other noise).
- Listen to white noise.
- Ask other to be quiet.
- Use noise cancelling headphones or ear plugs.
- Switch your phone to silent.
- Choose quiet environments.

#### *Distraction by sight*

- Move notice boards and pictures.
- Don't face the window.
- Make tasks interesting visually with colour and sticky notes.
- Use affirmations to help.

- Make sure environments are low-arousal (ie reduced lights and patterns).
- Ask people to not pass the doors within certain times.

#### *Distraction by thoughts*

- Observe your thoughts and notice when your mind drifts.
- Be mindful not to move on until you have refocussed on the task.
- Reward yourself for avoiding distractions.
- When reading stop and remember the last sentence you read.
- Say it aloud or write it down.
- Have a piece of paper handy to write down distracting thoughts so you won't forget them.

#### **Novelty**

One of the theories about ADHD is that it is a reward deficiency syndrome. We know that we do better with interesting, new tasks and need more rewards than other people. Fun and enjoyment is important to us and can make a huge difference to our motivation and energy.

#### **Top Tips**

- Creating novelty and interest – swap old tasks for new ones or do things in a different way or place
- Use competition – say “I’ll get this done in half an hour” Creating urgency even artificially can really help boost motivation
- Give yourself rewards – and take regular breaks to help you stay on track
- Don’t be unkind to yourself if you experience lapses, it rarely derails things entirely and we need to accept that we will have lapses and more importantly we’ll keep trying to move forward.