4 Tips for Overcoming Procrastination Caused by ADHD

by HEIDI HOWARTH

ADHD and Procrastination: Why Do Adults With ADHD Procrastinate?

Have you emptied and cleaned the refrigerator? Tidied that room you have meant to do for ages? No? Does any of this sound familiar? It does to me; I used to mentally beat myself up, and start to think I was weak, or lazy, or just no good at the tasks I was attempting, often even before I had given it a try. I had put myself through a huge range of emotions. Eventually, I always came to the same conclusion... "What was I thinking? I was never going to be able to do this, so why even try!" Really, it is a case of ADHD and procrastination.

It all sounds very dramatic, so just to clarify: this battle was an internal one. The self-doubt, frustration and sadness were never witnessed by anyone else. It was my fault. It was no one else's problem. Everyone else was doing just fine.

Of course, none of this was actually true.

I was diagnosed with ADHD six months ago. My ADHD medication does help me to focus now, but I have had 43 years before a diagnosis to battle against both ADHD and procrastination. I dealt with lots of bad habits I needed to break, including some very low self-esteem moments to try to get over.

You know you need to get on and focus, you have got everything ready, and then you are about to start and, “Oh, I will just check my emails...” 40 minutes later, I'm hunting on eBay for something I have just realized I really need!

Every time I sit down to tackle anything, I am completely committed to actually seeing it through. I do try, it is not an intentional way I go, I just find I am so easily distracted.

My job is to write books for children. I have to work to deadlines. Each day, I used to start the day with the intention to complete a lot of work. I wrote a lot of lists; they were always totally unmanageable and unrealistic. Every day the list grew. It grew to the point where I just gave up. It was too big to even tackle.

Here are some of the things that I have found to work for me for battling against ADHD and procrastination:

1. Stop Making Lists

I have stopped the lists! Some people, I know love their lists. For me, they just seem to end up as a record of all the things I should have got done. They become so distracting that I struggle to do any of them. So I do not impose any set lists. However, I have learned through experience not to trust my memory. Whenever you say, "Oh, I'll remember that!" you will not.

I have two ways to deal with this. Firstly, I have a notebook. Just a small one, and it goes with me everywhere. I know most people would use their phone for this, but for me, phone leads to the internet, the internet leads to

hours of distraction, and then nothing gets done.

The second is also old school: a wall calendar, one with big day sections so I can write in school stuff, work deadlines, any bills to sort out, etc. It is in the kitchen where everyone in the family can use it. It is simple, but it works. Everyone knows that it is a shared responsibility to add to it so nothing is forgotten.

2. The 5-Minute Rule

This is also a small one but it is one of the best tricks I have learned; I have a five-minute rule.

Now, this may seem very silly to anyone else, but I know when I sit down to work, realistically it could take me hours, but in my head, I have a five-minute rule. I will work for just five minutes and then I can take a break to have a little treat. I am British and it is probably a cliché but I do like my tea, so that is the reward I give myself.

The great thing is with the idea removed from my head that I will be stuck at the computer for hours, I become much more productive. I know that I just need to do five minutes, then take a break, then do five minutes more. However, I find I glance up at the clock and realize I have been writing for an hour... sometimes more!

I do always stop and have that break and that cup of tea though. I think the main thing I am learning is to be a little bit more optimistic and to not force myself to sit. If I want to move, I know I can in just five minutes.

3. Turn It Off

Now for a big one – the world wide web, or the ultimate distraction, as I like to call it.

We have brains that would have been brilliant in the Stone Age. If all we had to do every day was to hunt and gather, people with ADHD would be incredibly successful. But take that ADHD person, sit them at a desk and ask them to focus for hours, to sit still and stay in the same place. No chatting, just sitting and concentrating. What's going to happen? I can tell you what. The internet!

We live in the worst possible situation for ADHD – we have stimulation available 24/7. It is all accessible: from our desks, from our phones, at home on our computers. There are a billion things to distract us and a billion more things we can convince ourselves are worth looking at.

I know the idea may be terrifying, but turn it off. There, I said it. I know, it is crazy, but it really does help. When I first did it, I had real anxiety... I thought I might miss a very important email, or not know what a friend was having for lunch because I would miss the Facebook post. This does sound ridiculous when you write it down, doesn’t it?

4. Try Medication

I used to feel like my head was full of firework ideas and thoughts firing in a million different directions. Trying to focus on one idea or one job just seemed to be an impossibility.

Taking Concerta XL for the first time was a revelation. For the first time ever I had a calmness in my brain I had never experienced before. No medication is a magic fix, but for me, it has really helped me make some changes.

I think the most important thing is to make changes slowly. You cannot change your whole lifetime of experience in one day, or in one way. You have lived a certain way and found ways to deal with the challenges that ADHD has sometimes thrown at you, and you will get through procrastination too.

Our brains may be built a little differently, some of us may need to take medication, but it is important to remember there are positives of ADHD too. You know the chatty person who is the life of every part you go to? They probably have ADHD.

We do not have a condition that is visible, it is not something other people can see, which sometimes makes it

harder for people to understand. Life is a very long journey, but if you can just keep placing one foot in front of the other, you are getting somewhere. You do not need to know where the journey will end, but the beginning is a good place to start.