Dealing With Feeling Overwhelmed With ADHD

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What Can You Do When You Feel Overwhelmed?

If you have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), chances are you know what it is to feel overwhelmed. All too often I cannot process all the information clamoring for attention inside my head and I shut down completely.

When I have so much to do that I don't know where to begin, it's all too easy to just not start at all. Procrastination because of feeling overwhelmed is one of the biggest hurdles I climb as part of my ADHD. I know I'm not alone on this.

Why Does This Happen?

There are just too many things to pay attention to. No matter what we are trying to focus on, there is always interference.

When it feels like there are 10 people inside your head all talking at once, you never know who you are supposed to listen to. Things get garbled. Things get forgotten. Things get pushed aside.

We don't mean to — it just happens. And when we can't silence the noise to focus on the task at hand, we often find ourselves too overwhelmed to take any action at all.

We aren't lazy — we are overwhelmed. We no longer know where to start or how to go about completing tasks.

We can't decipher what order to do tasks in to complete a project, so we jump in somewhere in the middle, trying to go both directions at once. When that doesn't work we get frustrated and give up, not being able to see how we can fix it.

What Can We Do?

There are a lot of things we can do to help when we are overwhelmed. There are also steps we can take to try to head off the feeling before it takes hold.

- **Breathe** – bring your mind to the present and practice breathing deeply. Focus on the here and now.
- **Proper self care** – it is vital to get enough sleep, eat right, and exercise. Those things are not only good for your body, they are important for taking care of your mind too. Yoga for ADHD adults has proven to be very effective for symptom management. Taking care of yourself can greatly reduce symptoms of ADHD, making it much easier to manage.
- **Control impulses** – an ADHD brain wants continuous stimulation. Use music, art, puzzles and other creative pursuits to keep your brain engaged. This will help curb those impulsive moments.
- **Color-coding** – many people with ADHD find it helpful to color-code everything in their life, including files,

emails, schedules and to-do lists.

- **Cut back** – Purge any unnecessary possessions. The less you have, the easier it is to stay organized.
- **Just say no** – if you don't have time to do something or if you know it will add stress to your life, say no. Don't obligate yourself at the expense of your health or your peace of mind.
- **Waste time** – build time into each day to "waste." Schedule time to do nothing and give yourself a break.
- **Money management** – set up a simple money management and bill payment system. We often struggle with money, and having a system in place will reduce your chances of becoming overwhelmed.
- **Break down tasks** – We have all heard this one before, but it really is important. Prioritize tasks and break them down into steps that are easily achieved. This will cut down on procrastination because we know where to start and what to do.

What Works for Me (Usually)

I have tried many things to help my daughter and myself manage our ADHD. Some things didn't work, and some things work quite well, but I honestly forget to do them. Other things have become part of our routine.

- **Timers** – we use them for everything. I use timers to help me keep on task when I'm cleaning or working. I use them to remind me of when I need to leave the house or take medicine. My daughter uses a timer in the shower because apparently that is where she meditates about life.
- **Pill containers** – I do not currently take ADHD medications, but I cannot for the life of me remember if I took my other medicines, or if I gave my daughter hers. Weekly pill containers took away that stress.
- **Control journals** – this is our version of daily lists. We each have a binder and there is a page for each day of the week. The pages contain everything we need to do in the morning, when we get home from school and work, and everything we do before we go to bed. The pages also contain any chores or projects that need to be completed that day, all broken down into the steps we will have to take to get it done. There is a calendar in the back and I write on the calendar tasks that are to be taken care of weekly or monthly.

- **Read and connect** – I make time a few days a week to read ADHD articles, peruse discussion forums and read blogs. This not only keeps me current on new information and provides new tips and advice, but also helps me feel connected with others who have ADHD.

I will admit that I am not as organized as I should be and that I do not take as good of care of myself as I should. There are times when my symptoms are running rampant all over the place and I can't find the motivation to stop the cycle.

I am a master of procrastination and feel overwhelmed all too often. Much of the time I feel as if there is no adult at all in my house. And yet we manage. We make it through.

I try to control my symptoms, but sometimes they control me. And that's okay.

I've learned through the years that accepting myself where I am is the single most important thing I can do to successfully manage my ADHD and the overwhelming feelings that come with it.