Hyperfocus: Your Not So Secret ADHD Super Power

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Hyperfocus and ADHD

You would think with ADHD it'd be hard for you to focus on things you need to get done. But no! It's the other way around. (Sort of.) Have you ever been so focused while doing something that you forgot about everything except what you were doing?

Have you ever focused so hard while doing something that you forgot about everything except what you were doing?

This article will explain everything you need to know about hyperfocus, including the pros and cons of hyperfocusing and how to use hyperfocus to your advantage.

What you're doing is hyperfocusing, and it's something people with ADHD do more than people who don't have ADHD.

Why Do People With ADHD Hyperfocus More Often Than Those Who Don't Have ADHD?

Get ready for a quick psychology lesson involving dopamine and executive function.

People with ADHD can hyperfocus more often because there's something different about dopamine levels in an ADHD brain. Long story short, dopamine is a chemical signal your body produces to tell you that something is rewarding or fun. Dopamine is a chemical signal your body produces to tell you that something is rewarding or fun.

ADHD interferes with someone's "executive function." Executive function is the conductor of your brain, similar to the conductor of a train. Executive function tells you what you should and shouldn't do, like how a conductor tells a train to turn or keep going or stop.

Here's The Catch: Dopamine Plays a Big Role in Your Executive Function

When a person lacks dopamine, their executive function won’t work properly. Just like a train without a power source. (No more train metaphors I promise.)

It is well known how children with ADHD have a hard time paying attention in school. What may not be as well known is how easy it is for children with ADHD to focus on playing their favorite video games or reading their favorite books.

Now, look at yourself. You're an adult. You may have a hard time focusing on work, or doing whatever. But when you start doing something you enjoy, whether it’s reading, shopping, or pursuing your interests, you have no problems focusing your attention.

The reason you are able to focus on doing what you enjoy versus what you don't is because when you're doing things you enjoy your brain produces lots of dopamine.

None of the things you do would be enjoyable without dopamine. When you do something you think is boring, your brain won't produce much dopamine. This creates a "deficit" which prevents you from paying attention.

Now we can finally get to the pros and cons of hyperfocusing.

Hyperfocus: The Pros

For starters, being able to hyperfocus means you can get things done no matter how you feeling. While hyperfocusing you forget about eating, sleeping and using the bathroom.

Say you hyperfocus while doing something at work. Your work will get done faster and be of a higher quality because you are putting so much of yourself into it.

The bad news is you can't exactly hyperfocus anytime you please. The good news is if you start writing down the activities causing you to become hyperfocused you can better understand how to trigger, avoid, or control hyperfocus.

Hyperfocus: The Cons

The problem is you can enter a state of hyperfocus happen anytime, anywhere. If you take your kids to the park and then start hyperfocusing while doing some online shopping, you would most likely forget about your kids. Who knows what could happen in a situation like that.

Likewise, if you hyperfocusing on the job and spend an hour or two trying to fix a stapler, you would have a hard time explaining what happened to your boss.

Hyperfocus can cause you to forget about your family, your job and yourself at any moment, which is something you probably can't afford to do 99 percent of the time. This brings us to our next point.

Next page: who benefits the most from hyperfocusing? And how to use ADHD hyperfocus to your advantage.

Who Benefits The Most From Hyperfocusing?

It depends.

On the one hand, you would think entrepreneurs and people working in creative fields like writers or actors would benefit the most.

People like David Neeleman (Founder of Jet Blue Airlines), Emma Watson (Hermione from Harry Potter) and Richard Branson (Founder of Virgin Group, a multi-billion dollar conglomerate) come to mind.

But then again athletes, politicians, and scientist can also benefit from hyperfocusing. And unlike the people I mention above, you know these people.

I'm talking about Ex-American President John F. Kennedy, Serena Williams, Michael Jordan, Michael Phelps, and Albert Einstein. (Besides Kennedy and Einstein, these people are all verified to have ADHD).

When you get down to it, anyone can benefit from hyperfocus. One thing is for sure; you can't benefit from hyperfocusing if you never do anything you find fun, exciting or interesting. After all, that's what triggers hyperfocus.

More one this below.

How to Trigger and Use Hyperfocus to Your Advantage

Hyperfocusing gives you immense concentration which causes you to ignore the world around you so you can focus on the task at hand. There is no doubt this ability can be useful in the right setting.

But as you learned earlier in this article, you don't have a switch for hyperfocus. At least not yet anyway.

To understand how you trigger hyperfocus, you need to know what raises dopamine levels in your brain. Lack of dopamine and the inability to regulate its levels are two of the biggest causes of ADHD symptoms.

Yet hyperfocusing only occurs when dopamine is present at a higher level than usual for an ADHD person. To trigger hyperfocus you first need to figure out how to raise your dopamine levels.

The Four Elements That Trigger Your Hyperfocus

So far there are four known elements which can raise dopamine levels. They are:

1. Challenge
2. Curiosity
3. Interest
4. Urgency

If you ever hyperfocused in the past, one of these four elements was involved.

The thing is, we are all different. We don't find the same things challenging or interesting, and different things make us curious.

Think about what you find interesting or challenging. When is the last time you were curious? These are the things that will raise your dopamine levels and are also what you're most likely to hyperfocus on.

To give you an idea, here are a few activities that raise my dopamine levels sky-high and cause me to hyperfocus often:

1. Reading
2. Games
3. Long conversations over the phone or in person
4. Listening to music
5. Writing
6. Brushing my teeth

An activity like reading might cause me to hyperfocus because I become very curious or interested as I flip the pages.

A challenging game might cause me to hyperfocus because I want to win. And sometimes when I'm having a conversation I get so interested or curious I start hyperfocusing.

There you have it. Once you figure out what raises your dopamine levels, you will know what you can and can't easily hyperfocus on.

You can use the power of hyperfocusing to change your life for the better. The more you study yourself and what triggers you to hyperfocus, the more you can control when it happens.

Once you achieve mastery of hyperfocus, you'll be able to get more things done and feel happier.

Why Mastering Hyperfocus is Essential When You Have ADHD

Mastery of hyperfocus is a complete game changer when you have ADHD.

Mastering hyperfocus forces you to discover yourself. You will have to spend time learning who you are and defining your identity.

As you move closer and closer to mastery, you will become more self aware. Everything about you will change for the better. The way you perceive the world will change.

The reason why these changes happen is because mastering hyperfocus indirectly improves your executive function and helps you control your dopamine levels.

Additional benefits of improving your executive function and control of your dopamine levels are:

- Being less impulsive
- Making better decisions
- Having more energy
- Having less anxiety

Mastering hyperfocus is definitely not easy and will take you awhile to accomplish. But because you have ADHD it is doable.

However, it is important to note that I have written this article from the standpoint of someone who does not take stimulant ADHD medication.

The Effects of Stimulant ADHD Medication on Hyperfocus

Plain and simple, ADHD medication improves attention span. In doing so it makes a person less likely to get distracted, and thus less likely to hyperfocus. In theory anyway.

ADHD medication affects everyone differently. Taking medication might make mastering hyperfocus easier, harder, or even impossible.

Here are a few common ways to tell if you still experience periods of hyperfocus or not while on medication:

- You watch TV for hours on end
- You play video games hours on end
- You do trivial things for hours on end

The bottom line is, if you find yourself focusing for hours on end without realizing it, you are hyperfocusing.

Remember, you are most likely to hyperfocus on activities and things you find:

1. Challenging
2. Curious
3. Interesting
4. Urgent

If you think hyperfocusing is having a negative impact on your life, I suggest you continue researching more about hyperfocus. And don’t forget to bookmark this article, it will come in handy!