ADHD and Time Management

by ERIC PATTERSON

How Do I Manage My Time?

Your deadlines always approach sooner than you want. You annoy your family and friends because you are always late. Something that should take 15 minutes takes you four days. When you finally get a chance to do something fun, you completely lose track of time.

If this sounds like you, it’s official: you have poor time management skills. Lacking time management skills might lead to funny consequences in the movies, but more often than not, it can result in negative effects that impact you and your loved ones. In this article, we'll be looking at attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and how it related to time management.

What is ADHD?

For many, time management is not the problem — it is a symptom of the problem. To solve poor time management, you have to get to the root of the problem: ADHD.

ADHD is made up of two parts: inattention and hyperactivity. Each of these components can produce unwanted effects on someone’s time management skills. When you put them together, they can cause serious havoc.

When people have ADHD, they cannot simply “just pay attention” or “quit being so hyper” because they have a psychological condition that makes it extremely challenging.

There is hope, though. Recent advances in technology enable you to use tools not previously available to people in your situation. You can build new and improve existing time management skills using the latest technology and practical solutions.

Using Technology for ADHD Time Management

If you have poor time management skills from ADHD, technology must be your friend. At the onset, you will not have the ability to keep track of time or list what you have to do independently — you will need assistance.

This is where technology comes into play. With the use of technology, you can:

- Set timers to track the amount of time spent on a task
- Set alarms to indicate when your deadline is approaching
- Create reminders to manage events based on time or location
- Stay connected to supportive people in your life
- Gain access to useful information to maintain focus

Use Your Smartphone or Devices

The best form of technology will be the one that is most accessible. For many, this piece of technology is their smartphone.

These devices can complete the simplest tasks, like waking you up on time, so you are not late for work or your first class. They can work as timers to let you know when your break is over and it’s time to get back to the task at hand. They can let you speak to a supportive person to gain suggestions on your next step.

Smartphones also have a list of sophisticated tools based on their GPS, messaging and movement tracking capabilities. Some of these abilities are built right into the phone while others are available through apps – which can be beneficial if you're looking for a practical time management app for ADHD.

The major limitation here will be your willingness to experiment with options that might not work until you find ones that do work based on your needs. Trial and error will be needed.

To maximize the use of technology, consider investing in a smartwatch that integrates with your phone. A phone that is two rooms away will be easily forgotten and ignored, but a beeping and buzzing device strapped to your wrist will be harder to avoid.

Rather than being glorified pedometers, smartwatches can streamline reminders, alarms, timers, and communication to make the processes more accessible.

For example, if you typically run late, you could consider setting a verbal reminder from your watch to your phone that notifies you when it is time to start getting ready and notifies you how much time you need to travel to your destination.

Don’t Abuse Technology

As much as technology can be a fantastic asset to someone with ADHD-related time management skills, it can be a problem as well.

The same devices that can spark progress can be sources of distraction. A simple scroll through social media can result in a two-hour time-wasting experience down a black hole of high school acquaintances.

One more “harmless” video game can lead to a 12-hour digital killing spree that results in the death of relationships and employment.

Everyone is prone to these actions, but people with ADHD are at greater risk because the constant stimulation is a welcome feeling. Many ADHD symptoms are triggered by a changed threshold of stimulation in areas of the brain.

Flickering screens and the ability to control the actions of a digital character are very welcome and very addictive for someone with ADHD. Unfortunately, they will increase the chances of poor time management.

Tips for Ending Technology Distraction

To end technology abuse, consider actions to make it less pervasive like:

- Turn off automatic notifications on social media
- Insist people talk to you on the phone rather than long texting conversations
- Work to redirect your focus on the world and people around you
- Limit video game time based on your tendencies.
- Avoid having phones, tablets, and laptops around you at all times.

Most people do not need to take any of the above steps to improve their time management skills, but most people do not have ADHD.

For someone with poor time management skills rooted in ADHD, technology will present as a major influence. On the one hand, it can be a tremendous asset. On the other hand, it can be a vicious foe.

Your task is to create an environment based on the best technology has to offer and avoid the rest. It is time to turn off and tune in.

Practical ADHD Time Management Tools

Alex provides his top 3 ADHD time management productivity hacks to help you overcome your ADHD to get things done.

You write to-do lists, but you still don't get enough done. And if you're anything like my ADHD mom, you've probably found yourself halfway back home after picking the kids up from daycare only to look in the backseat and realize you've left one behind, *again*.

Ah yes, I cherish those childhood memories.

Enough is enough – the time for you to become more productive, focused and less forgetful is now!

I developed three productivity hacks to overcome my ADHD, and now I'm going to share them with you.

Measure Your Time

You wake up every day with the same 24 hours as everyone else. Being productive isn't about being busy, it's about using your time efficiently. You have to get the most out of your time because once you waste it, there's no getting it back.

So how do you get the most out of your time? It's simple.

Measure Everything You Do

The only way you can become more productive is if you measure how long it takes you to finish things (like writing emails, or something you do at work.) Fortune 500 companies are continually doing this because wasted time is wasted money.

The same applies to you.

Do you want to be more productive? So ask yourself, what's making you unproductive? And we don't mean ADHD. What we mean is:

- Who or what is making you lose focus?
- What activities take up the most of your time?

You need to start keeping track of or measuring how long it takes you to do things. For example, keeping track of how long it takes me to write this article.

When I'm finished, I'll compare the time it took me to complete this article compared to the last one I wrote. This will allow me to see if I wrote this article fast enough.

If it took me an hour or two longer to write this article than the last one, that's a signal telling me I wasn't as productive as I could've been. In this case, I'd think back to everything I was doing while I was writing this article.

Maybe I was on my phone or got sidetracked while doing research. Whatever it was, I'll be sure to note what I did wrong so when I start writing a new article, I can read the note and avoid repeating the same mistake.

This is a process of "reviewing & improving" you can apply to anything you do.

The Best Way to Stay Focused is to Remove Distractions Completely

Every second you spend on your phone is a second you could've used to get something done. If you want to get the most out of your time you need to create a "productive, friendly environment."

Which means: your phone is set to airplane mode, the TV is off, and your to-do list is only a few feet away from you.

I strongly recommend you:

- Start writing to-do lists if you aren't already.
- Keep your to-do lists nearby at all times.

Being able to see your to-do list will help you form plans, stay focused and keep yourself organized. I check my to-do list as often if not more than I check my phone.

The bottom line is this: if there's nothing to distract you then you can't get distracted.

Do What's On Your To-Do Lists

One important thing to remember about to-do list is you can't just write stuff down and expect it to get done magically.

You have to review your to-do lists consistently. Anytime you finish a task; you need to cross it off on your to-do lists. This will give you a chance to remind yourself of everything else on your to-do lists you need to get done and choose a new "do" to complete.

You also need to look at your to-do lists when you wake up and when it's time for bed. This way you can start your day with knowing what needs to get done ASAP. This has saved me many times when it comes to deadlines and appointments I forgot about.

To give you an idea, I have three to-do lists. One is for work and another for school. My third to-do list covers "miscellaneous" to-dos like appointments. I write mine down on notebook paper and usually use at least one whole page.

I hope these ADHD productivity hacks I've told you about will help you get more done with your time.