Facing the Morning with ADHD

by JEN NORTH

What You Should Know About Mornings with ADHD

Getting into the habit of a good routine can be enough for anyone to wake up and face the morning with a plan. However, for people with ADHD, the very nature of our brains it can be especially grueling.

The ADHD brain hates morning routines as it is wired to pay attention to novelty and things it finds interesting. Mornings, especially Monday mornings are not interesting, but instead boring and mundane. It is not a matter of willpower rather of neural connections, neurotransmitters, and brain wiring.

The Morning Battle

Executive function is the cognitive process that organizes daily thoughts and activities. It allows us to prioritize tasks, manage time efficiently, and make decisions. Skills in executive functioning allow us to establish structures and strategies for managing our goals and plan for actions to move each project forward.

ADHD is an impairment in executive functioning, which makes it difficult for us to organize our time, prepare materials for a task, prioritize, and set deadlines. Morning routines require all these skills which are especially challenging for people with ADHD.

I have always preferred the late night-time to the early morning. Everything is always so busy and hectic in the morning and there is so much to do. As a child I struggled to get ready for school on time most mornings which created lots frustration for my parents. Instead I would be transfixed by the morning cartoons playing on the television screen. My parents eventually used the airtime of the cartoons to their advantage.

During the TV commercials I would have to rush to complete jobs such as getting dressed, preparing my own breakfast, and sorting out any school supplies I needed during the day. Surprising this system which was like a game worked for me. The sooner I completed jobs the less cartoons I missed.

As an adult who has often worked nine to five jobs, my struggles with the mornings have continued. Many of my former managers and bosses would agree that my greatest fault was always the lack of punctuality. Five years ago after having my son I started working from home as a freelance writer. This allowed me to set my own hours and I usually write during the evening when I felt most awake. However, a couple of years ago my son started kindergarten and that familiar panic that came with the morning rush soon returned. It took a bit of trial and error but eventually I was able to develop some simple tips and strategies for managing mornings with ADHD.

Tips for Managing Mornings with ADHD

People with ADHD often don’t think too much about our morning routine until our alarms have been snoozed a few times. Once we are finally awake, we tend to panic and create a stressed start to the morning. We cope much better if we have battle plan to manage our morning routine. Alleviate the struggle of boredom and distraction by

keeping the routine minimal, consistent, and visual. If you have children, you can also try implementing games into your morning routine.

During the Week

- Use a notice board in your kitchen to keep track of any appointments and reminders.
- Discuss with your partner or family any plans for the week.
- Keep track of groceries supplies and write a shopping list that is updated regularly.

The Night Before

- Ensure you have prepared as much as possible the night before by having your clothes laid out, bags packed, and shoes by the front door.
- Try to avoid screen time right before bedtime.
- Allow yourself 10 hours of restful sleep.
- Be aware it might take you longer to get ready in the morning than you anticipate.
- Set at least two alarms to ensure you wake in time.

That Morning

- Get up when your alarm first goes off. Heading straight to the shower will help wake you up. Get dressed.
- Start your day by making your bed, as it sets an organized tone for the day.
- Set a series of alarms on your phone to prompt you and keep you aware of the time.
- Have a simple, but healthy breakfast that is quick and easy to prepare such as cereal, fruit, yogurt, or toast.
- Consult notice board for any appointments or important notes.
- Divide and conquer all tasks with your partner and/or any older children, so that everyone knows their jobs.
- Be strict with social media either ignore it altogether or set a short amount of time to browse with a set alarm.
- Keep essentials such as your keys, wallet, phone, and anything else you need for the day by the front door. This avoids last minute searching before you leave the house.

So, when it comes to managing mornings with ADHD, stick to a regular routine each day as much as possible, but be willing to adjust your plans to accommodate any changing needs. Don’t be too discouraged if it takes some time to find your wings, after a few successful morning take offs out the door you might soon just find yourself sailing through the morning rush on autopilot.