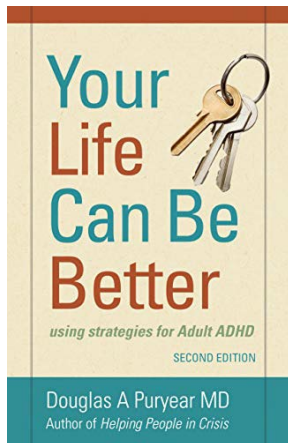


Your Life Can Be Better Second Edition: using strategies for adult ADHD by Douglas A. Puryear



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I'm a psychiatrist who has ADHD. I'm going to share with you some of the ways I've learned to cope with my ADHD problems.

The strategy is to put my keys on the table by the front door. I always put my keys on the front table. I don't allow myself to put them anywhere else, not "just for now," not "just this time," not "because I'm busy."

Now that is a strategy that becomes a rule. And the rule helps me make it a habit. And a habit means that I don't have to think about it anymore. Strategy.... Rule.... Habit....

Summary: * Identify a problem. * Pick a strategy.

Make a rule. * Stick with it. * It becomes a habit. * Life is easier.

This book focuses on strategies, tried and true ways to deal with your ADHD and to make your life much easier. I know they work.

Most people's focus centre is turned on by the fact that something is important. Not ours. We understand "important." We can acknowledge "important," but "important" does nothing for us. "Important" does not turn on our focus centre and we can be nearly helpless to try to get something done without our focus centre on.

Focus Turn-ons

1. Things that happen to be of personal interest to us.
2. Something novel to us.
3. Something that's a challenge.
4. Something with an immediate deadline

It's useful to remember these four-focus centre turn-ons: personal interest, novelty, challenge, and deadline. Then we can use them to help ourselves focus and get some things done. Sometimes I use them to play mind games with myself so I can trick my brain into focusing

Strategies are tools to help us deal with problems and thus make our life go smoother and easier.

Small steps are a major coping strategy for dealing with ADHD. It has many uses; it helps deal with inertia, procrastination, distractions, and with getting things finished.

Break tasks into small steps. Limit the to-do list to five things. Focus on one at a time. You never have more than that one thing that you need to do at any given moment.

Don't let things pile up. If they pile up, they become overwhelming and

harder to do. Stay on top of them. Break tasks into small parts. If somehow you still get behind (and like me, you probably will), then break the task into manageable small steps.

“Is this a good use of my time?” I need to pause occasionally in the middle of whatever I’m doing and ask this question. This is a form of “awareness,” which I’ll also discuss later. This is also a good approach when I’m being asked to do something. Will the benefits justify the use of my time?

I do put a dollar value on my time and that helps me make some decisions, such as when to hire someone to do some work in or around the house and when to do it myself.

Minimize decisions. I’m not great at making decisions. I can ruminate for a long time over the pros and cons and still wind up on the fence. Part of the reason is that with ADHD, I have trouble prioritizing. Everything looks important.

If I can minimize decisions, it simplifies my life even more.

Habits avoid decisions. For example, I don’t have to decide every morning whether or not I’m going to brush my teeth. I just do it. And I don’t have to decide where to put my keys.

Focusing on doing one thing and forgetting about the rest simplifies the moment.

Is the right solution to this minor problem; it’s about learning to recognize that something is a problem.

Then you can think of a solution.

The goal was just not realistic, and it led to discouragement and demoralization, two emotions familiar to ADHDers.

So, it's setting small, manageable, realistic goals with a good chance of success. Life not only feels better but goes better.

"Is this really the best use of this time?" and "Why am I doing this? What is the goal or purpose?" and "Is there something I'm avoiding?"

We do need recreation and relaxation and breaks. We need to make sure that we get them. We also need to make sure that we aren't using the need for relaxation as an excuse to avoid doing something else that is difficult or unpleasant or that we aren't sure we can do well.

Writing this book I decided it was a reasonable use of my time. But that is the question that needed to be asked. The book could have been a trap, just swallowing large amounts of time into a deep black hole, while other things just slide. A real dead end project.

So it is with most anything I start to do. I need to ask myself, "Is this really useful? What is the purpose? Is this the best use of my time?"

What turns our focus center on? Personal interest. Novelty. Challenge. Heavy immediate deadline. So when faced with a task that doesn't fit one of these, sometimes I use mind games to fool my focus center into turning on. Sometimes this works. This gives me more control over my life.

I've learned to eliminate "I should" and "I have to" from my internal vocabulary. Instead, I say to myself, "I need to--", or "It would be good if I--." This reduces the resistance and thus the procrastination.

I can use imagination to change my perception and attitude.

This is an example of 'reframing,' putting a different slant on something.

I do have some choice in how I view things. This is partly a matter of self-talk.

Because we have ADHD, we need to simplify our lives. The basic approach is to identify a problem, develop a strategy, make the strategy a rule, make the rule a habit.

With ADHD, we can have many kinds of problems regarding time: wasting it, misjudging it, losing track of it, and being temporally disoriented. We tend to be interested in many things, and it's hard to accept that we have to make choices. Then we feel short of time. So we need strategies.

The clock is ticking and I'm not getting anything done and my big to-do list is long. I get exasperated, frustrated and antsy if I feel like I'm wasting time. Some of this is compulsiveness but I think most of it is ADHD. One of the symptoms of ADHD is impatience.

If I'm stuck in traffic, or in a line, or in a waiting room I make good use of the time.

Priorities, one of the many reasons for my trouble with time is my difficulty in setting priorities.

What is important and what isn't? What do I really need to get done and what can sit undone forever and not make any difference?

We have trouble understanding or estimating time.

We need to realize that there are limits to what we can expect to do. Therefore we need to prioritize, and we need strategies to help us do that.

Making habits takes time and effort, but can pay off big in the long run. Start by identifying the problem as a problem and decide if it's enough of a problem to justify working on it. Our life is simpler if we're using habits rather than having to make a lot of decisions.

Habits can be changed with commitment and effort. The first step is to clearly define what you want to change.

Then a major tool is 'spotting,' simply noticing every time you do the habit; this increases awareness.

Use strategies to avoid getting overloaded or overwhelmed or rushed in the first place. However, when you do feel that way, it's time to stop and organize. List all the things to do, then pick five, then one. Break it down into small steps and focus on one step at a time; forget the list. Take a break when you need it.

Some days it's a moral triumph just to get through the day. Just put one foot in front of the other. Just plug away. One thing at a time. Small steps.

'Important' is just not important to our focus centre, but we can use mind games to trick our focus center into turning on. Deadlines and schedules can turn on our focus centre and help us stay on track and avoid traps.

Scheduling provides structure and helps us gain control of our life. We can think about the consequences of not completing a task on time and the rewards of doing it.

We can tolerate mess and clutter; often we just don't see it. But we can learn to pay attention to it, at least at times. We probably function better if things are neat, clean and organized.

There's no one size fits all approach to coping with ADHD; we each have to find what works for us.

Strategies, such as gadgets and organizing systems, can reduce the frustration caused by losing things and by not being able to find things.

There are gifts that go along with ADHD, such as being able to function in chaos or in a crisis, and the gift of creativity. Then we need strategies to implement our creative ideas. Delegating is a good strategy. And we need' to keep our creativity from leading us astray.

Part of our hyperactivity may be that we need extra stimulation to help us focus. We may not be able to control our hyperactivity, but we can develop strategies to cope with it.

ADHD starts building a sense of shame in us from early childhood. How bad our shame is depends a lot on how our parents and others reacted toward us around the ADHD problems and on what experiences we happened to run into.

The shame is an anchor holding us back, a major saboteur of our efforts, and it makes us miserable. Shame can be helped with therapy and with strategies that help us function better.

We need to have compassion for ourselves. We need to acknowledge the limitations and problems that ADHD gives us without blaming ourselves or being judgmental.

Self-talk is always going on in our heads and often causes problems if it's negative. It leads us into self-fulfilling prophecies, usually of failure. The habit of negative self-talk is damaging. If we let ourselves become aware of the self-talk, we can then control its effects to some degree. We can spot it and name it, and we can counter it with positive self-talk.

A reward, whether it's a compliment, a material reward, or just attention and acknowledgment, is a powerful reinforcer of desired

behavior, and we can use it on ourselves. We can practice catching ourselves 'doing something good.'

We receive a lot of criticism from ourselves and from others, and we see many of our efforts as ending in failure. This feeds our shame, negative self-image and pessimism, and it's anti-motivating.

We need to receive positive reinforcement for accomplishing things, even if we have to give it to ourselves, which is often the case.

Perfectionism is one example of all or nothing thinking: "If it's not perfect, it's a failure."

We have a tendency to all-or-nothing thinking and perfectionism, which can cause or reinforce a lot of our problems. When we learn to spot this we can cope with it, although maybe with some effort and not perfectly.

There are other lies that are part of the American tradition, like "You can be anything you want to be." I could never have been an NFL football player even if I'd abused steroids. "You can do anything you set your mind to." I was never going to be a good pole vaulter, or a professional singer or a tap dancer.

I would never be able to remember where I'd put my keys if I didn't have a strategy. It wouldn't have mattered how hard I tried or how much I set my mind or how much I wanted to.

These lies all support a perfectionistic viewpoint, and since we don't measure up to the goal, they feed our sense of inadequacy and failure. They just make life harder.

Another lie, or at least misconception, is that we can do better by just trying harder. Not if we have ADHD.

The perfect is the enemy of the good. Perfectionism and all-or-nothing thinking undermine us. We need to learn to love “good enough” if it really is good enough. If we have ADHD, trying harder isn’t going to work. We need to try smarter. We need to use strategies.

Our choice of an occupation can be a major issue for us ADHDers. We’re certainly better suited for some jobs than for others. Then we need strategies to help us function in our occupation.

We need occupations where our strengths work for us and our weaknesses are not too handicapping. We need jobs where there is both structure and variety. We need each day to be the same overall and yet to have details that vary.

Capitalize on your strengths. Don’t spend much effort trying to improve your weaknesses: learn to work around them, using strategies. Try to find the right job, one with variety within structure.

Strategies can help us work around our weaknesses rather than struggle to improve them. Ideally, we can delegate the things we’re weak at. For example, we can be creative, with great ideas, but we tend to be lousy at actually doing the work to implement them. So create, then delegate!

Some jobs fit us perfectly and some types of jobs are disasters for people with ADHD. They can almost destroy us. We need variety within structure. We need to avoid work requiring precision, concentration, repetition, and neatness.

When possible, we need to delegate the things we are not good at. Know Thyself.

If one partner has ADHD, both partners need to address it. It will help greatly if the non-ADHD partner understands ADHD, and if they don’t

become a parent figure or a critic or a nag. The responsibility for dealing with ADHD is up to the person who has it, hopefully with help from the other.

We ADHDers tend to not do well with advice, supervision or bossing, which may revive our feeling that we're basically incompetent.

It's good to have a job where the overseeing is minimal.

We can help ourselves by becoming educated about ADHD.

Studying with ADHD means dealing with focus and concentration issues and avoiding distractions.

The Ability to Hyperfocus. Hours of full engagement and concentration in a task, IF you find it interesting.

Rapid Fire Mind. Your brain processes information at hyperspeed.

Your rapid fire brain + highly creative mind + the ability to hyperfocus equals fast absorption of new information quickly.

Stimulus Seeking Brain. A perfect match for the wired world, an under stimulated brain and an over stimulated virtual environment. Being an info junkie can be a good thing.

Constantly Scanning your Environment. Allows you to notice more and find information and resource that others miss.

Great in a Crisis. High energy intense situation? Lots of chaos and change? Sign me up; I thrive on stimulation, change and chaos. We can

create order from chaos effortlessly. We can also create such an environment as well if needed.

Risk Taker. Impulsivity means you're more willing to take risks and have a bias for action, act now while the opportunity is hot instead of getting into analysis paralysis.

We tend to avoid things. Paying attention to what we're avoiding will at least give us the chance to use strategies to get going, and the small steps strategy is useful again.

We get stuck in negative feedback loops and become paralyzed. We can get out of them by breaking the cycle. The trick is to do something! Find something small enough and easy enough that you can get yourself to do it. You'll need to counter the negative self-talk with a lot of positive self talk.

Our inattentiveness can be misinterpreted and can distress or annoy others. We need to be aware of the problem and takes steps to deal with it; we need strategies.

Impatience, impulsive and irritable all have to do with our relative lack of self-control. These three cause us a lot of problems in relationships. They are unpleasant in their own right. We need to have awareness and to have strategies on hand to deal with these.

Finishing, or rather, not finishing, is a major ADHD problem. The strategies include planning ahead, being sure that the project is worth doing and why, and that it's not biting off more than we can chew.

Then if we're stuck, we can break it into small steps and get unstuck. We can also discuss with ourselves the benefits of finishing and the consequences of not finishing, hoping to make the benefits and consequences heavy enough to motivate us.

We ADHDers are often called irresponsible, unreliable, and lazy. I don't think I'm lazy. I like to work. I'm great at manual labour. I've chopped cotton in the fields, hauled hay, and rolled cotton bales around. I'm a hard worker, at manual labor, but intellectual labor is hard for me. I tend to put it off. I don't look forward to it. I procrastinate. I tire easily.

We ADHDers can look lazy and irresponsible. That's a bad rap, although the outcome often looks the same as if were true. We are indeed unreliable, at least sometimes. This can be helped with strategies.

School systems sometimes seem to just be going through the motions. Today schools "teach to the tests" to protect the teachers and the systems, rather than trying to give the children an education.

Exercise is one part of treatment for ADHD. There are strategies to make it easier to keep up with the physical activity. So, we have the four S's: structure and schedule, sleep, and some physical activity.

These foster healthy living but specifically they help us ADHDers to focus and to function better. Using these four S's provides a foundation on which to build the strategies, rules and habits. Meditation and yoga can also help.

Mindfulness is the act of focusing attention on what's going on: "What am I feeling right now? What am I thinking right now? What am I doing right now? What is happening around me right now?" Awareness is the result of mindfulness; we become aware of what's going on, in and around us.

Mindfulness includes a nonjudgmental attitude; you don't judge what you become aware of. You don't label it good or bad. You don't try to change it. You just be aware of it and let it be. It is as it is.

Mindfulness and awareness can help with ADHD:

One book, 10 Simple Solutions to Adult ADHD by Sarkis

Sticky Notes is a free computer program that makes little yellow notes that I can bring up on my computer desktop.

Moderation is not a word that's in our vocabulary. We procrastinate and avoid, so we tend to not do anything.

However, once we're into something, we tend to overdo it.

I know that I can't eat just one cookie. This has been well-proven. I can't keep a balance, can't eat them in moderation. So I don't let myself eat any.

No cookies. I don't get started. So I lack the willpower to eat just one cookie, but on the other hand I do have the willpower to keep myself from starting with the first one.