

## Stop the Pain, Start Your Plan!

We ADHDers tend to have grand and wonderful ideas –there’s just one problem—we haven’t a clue how to get from point A to point B to turn those dreams into reality. You may be brilliant, but unfortunately, it’s hard to be taken seriously when you’re also a mess.

And why are you a mess, my friend? It’s simple -- you DON’T PLAN AHEAD!!

The good news is: it’s not your fault. It’s your brain wiring that’s to blame. It’s been proven that most people with ADHD have trouble with executive functions; that is, we struggle more than non-ADHDers do with planning, prioritizing, organizing, and managing time.

So, if you’ve tried and failed to keep your life ‘together’—join the club!!

People offer all kinds of suggestions: “Write things down,” “Give yourself extra time,” “Just wake up a few minutes earlier each day,” and so on. They wonder why we can’t seem to stay on top of things. They think, “(your name here) is so bright, what’s the problem? Making out a to-do list isn’t exactly rocket science!”

I’m here to tell you that they’re wrong – for us, planning ahead *IS ROCKET SCIENCE!!!* It does *NOT* come naturally to people with ADHD. You need to raise the white flag and surrender. If you think you’ll just *magically get everything done* tomorrow, you are lying to yourself!!

So, we’re going to get you out of your rut of not planning ahead using a simple formula:

**P**ull together activities

**L**ist all associated tasks

**A**llocate blocks of time

**N**ow reward yourself!

# **P**ull together activities

**Step 1: Pull together all the activities you need to incorporate into your life; that is, all the things you **C.A.R.E.** about. Jot them down on a piece of scrap paper...**

## CHORES

Chores refers to things that generally take more than a few minutes, and that you need to do on a regular basis, but probably not every day.

These may include:

- Laundry
- Mowing the Lawn
- Paying Bills
- Grocery Shopping
- Mopping Floors
- Getting the Car Washed

## APPOINTMENTS

Appointments are fixed-in-time, important activities that require you to be somewhere at a specific time.

(Note: Appointments differ from events in that their purpose is not primarily social or recreational)

These may include:

- Work or Work-Related Meetings
- Doctor's Appointments
- Classes
- Court Dates
- Hair Appointments

## ROUTINES

Routines are (usually) daily activities that you perform habitually. (Note: It may be easier to remember them if you combine several activities together and name the group of activities. For example, the routine "dinner at home" may involve 3 steps: cooking, setting the table, and cleaning dishes afterward)

Examples may include:

- Morning Rituals
- Responding to Emails and Calls
- Before-Bed Rituals
- Feeding Children and/or Pets

## EVENTS

Events are (usually) social, recreational, or family-related activities. Events also include celebratory dates, such as birthdays or anniversaries.

(Note: It may be helpful to add celebratory dates for the purpose of remembering them, regardless of whether a celebration is planned)

Events may include:

- Social Gatherings
- Family Parties
- Sporting Events
- Dinner Dates
- Weddings

# List all associated tasks

**Step 2:** For each activity, regardless of which category it falls into (*note: the C.A.R.E. categories exist only to jog your memory – don't worry if your activities don't fit neatly into one category*), determine if there are any related tasks that need to be done, and if so, add those tasks below the activities...

**Hint:** Do this quickly without too much thought; just make sure your times and dates are correct. Don't waste your time making this pretty. Perfectionism is a common ADHD trap!!

## Example of Event

Joe's Graduation - Aug 16, 1pm

1. Bring dress to cleaners
2. Buy gift card
3. Call Mom, see if she needs a ride

## Example of Chore

Buy Groceries Friday

1. Make List
2. Text Lisa; ask what type of tomatoes she used in recipe

## Example of Chore

Drive Mike to soccer Wednesdays

1. Make sure his uniform is clean
2. Sign release form, give to coach

## Example of Routine

Weekday Morning Routine

1. Wake up, drink coffee
2. Have quiet time
3. Go to gym (30 min)
4. Shower
5. Makeup, hair
6. Get dressed
7. Breakfast
8. Leave by 8:30am

## Example of Appointment

Manicure w/Mary Tues., 8/26, 2pm

## Allocate blocks of time

**Step 3: Now that you've assembled all the nuts and bolts of your schedule and its associated tasks, it's time to enter your data into whatever type of format works best for you (i.e. smartphone app, paper planner, bullet journal, wall calendar, combination of these, etc.)**

**Of course, you likely ALREADY DO THIS STUFF—at least to some extent—but do you do it well? Is your schedule working for you? Do you schedule your own routines and chores or do you tend to let your own life slide while you desperately try to catch up with the demands of the world?**

**Check out the FAQ's below to help you start anew or improve upon your current planning methods. Remember this, though: Everyone is different—the best system is the one that works for you!**

Questions	Answers
Do I have to keep tasks AND my schedule in my planner? Can't I just make my schedule and figure out the tasks as I go?	Of course you can figure out the tasks as you go. The only reason to make a draft copy of your agenda items and associated tasks is to REMIND yourself about those easily-forgotten tasks!
I already use a bullet journal to track all this stuff and it works great for me. Do I need to start over and do it this new way?	No. If you've come up with a system that works for you, please continue to use it. People with ADHD tend to start new planning systems all the time because they have trouble being consistent with whichever type of planner they're currently using. If you've found a winner, stick with it!
Why is it necessary to include my daily routines, such as my before-bed tasks, when figuring out my schedule for the week? I do that stuff automatically.	If you're on autopilot with your routines (like your bedtime routine), and have no trouble starting or completing your routines—regularly, and in a reasonable amount of time—there's no reason to include them in your agenda on, say, your smartphone's calendar app. Just make sure you're being honest about how much time your routines actually take. We ADHDers tend to minimize how long we spend on things, especially everyday, normal things like getting ready for bed.
How do I "pull together" all those agenda items you mentioned in step one? For example, sometimes I vaguely remember setting up a doctor's appointment, but I have no idea where I wrote down the date and time or IF I wrote it down at all!	Firstly, using scratch paper and reviewing the C.A.R.E categories may help jog your memory about agenda items you may have forgotten. Still, you need a system for immediately recording appointments you make. It's important to stop what you're doing whenever an exchange of a date and time happens, and write it down. In this situation I recommend using some type of app with reminders. For example, the basic Google calendar is great because it syncs with everything. And don't worry if you make people repeat the information several times while you enter it in your calendar accurately. Better to do it slowly and get it right the first time!

## **N**ow reward yourself!

**Step 4: Celebrate your schedule with a fun, dopamine-enhancing treat! Maybe go outside and take a walk or watch television or eat something you enjoy. The point is that planning ahead is very difficult for people with ADHD, and while it seems like a simple thing, it can overwhelm us and make our brains hurt when we consider everything we deem important. The truth is, we can't possibly accomplish everything that comes into our heads. We need to keep our to-do lists simple and our schedules manageable.**

**See below for some additional tips:**

- ✚ **Schedule (that means block out a time) during your week to, well, create your weekly schedule. Take as much time as you need to figure it out. Reward yourself afterward!**
- ✚ **Your weekly schedule should have enough in it to give each day a 'shape,' but remember to leave adequate margin between activities, and allow 1.5 times more than you think you need to get to places on time.**
- ✚ **Don't give up if you find you don't adhere to your schedule perfectly. When it comes to self-imposed activities, such as say, going to the gym in the time frame you planned to, it's okay to reschedule yourself, just as you might reschedule a plan to meet someone for lunch. But remember, some flexibility is a good thing; however, the goal is to create self-imposed structure you can count on. As soon as you disregard your own structure, you'll likely fall into impulsive or people-pleasing behaviors, and will reap chaos in your life as a result. You need to stand up for the rules—*YOUR RULES*—that will make your life better!**
- ✚ **Don't overwhelm yourself by taking on too much. Consider the *possibility* you're in denial about what's reasonable. Schedule enough to get important things done, but don't overdo it.**
- ✚ **Honor the way you view time, because it's unique to you. For example, there's no reason to schedule your flex time into strict, 15- or 30-minute increments, unless it helps you. Still, *MAKE SURE YOU KNOW* when you're free to experience your own 'fuzzy' time, and when you must *SNAP OUT OF IT* and conform to the clock!**