

Get Organized: The ADHD Experts on Time Management and Decluttering

Manage time, battle clutter, fight forgetfulness, and be as organized as experts with these 40 tips! *by ADDitude Editors*

Do you struggle with time management, procrastination, and keeping track of important information and belongings? Like you, Michael Laskoff, is faced with these typical attention deficit hyperactivity disorder symptoms and challenges. "I've always struggled with organization," he says. "Back in my student days, school provided me with structure and clear deadlines to keep me on the straight and narrow. When I started working at a job, however, many of those signposts disappeared. I had to develop my own system for getting things done."

"I have books written by expert organizers that I never got around to reading," says Laskoff, who, before starting AbilTo, founded The Branded Asset Management Group and worked in senior marketing roles at McKinsey, Bertelsmann, and CompUSA. "I purchased organizational systems, many of which I lost, and I installed get-organized software programs -- all of which I studiously ignored."

What works for Laskoff? The KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid) approach. For him, less is more, and basic is best. *ADDitude* asked Laskoff and seven other ADD/ADHD experts for their simplest, most effective organizational tips.

Michael Laskoff, CEO of AbilTo.com, *ADDitudeMag.com* blogger, and author of *Landing on the Right Side of Your Ass*



Buy bright and shiny objects. When it comes to personal effects -- keys, wallet, pens, notebooks, umbrella -- I avoid black. Black objects are easy to overlook and lose. I own a red wallet and orange notebooks; my phone is encased in a green color that does not exist in nature.

Know what you will forget. I forget the names of business acquaintances or a meeting time almost as soon as someone tells me. Knowing that, I make an appointment only when I can write it down on my calendar. I also record vital information on a person's business card on the day it's given to me. If possible, I attach a picture of the person next to the entry. Most important, I synch and back up everything.

Dress the night before. I'm not a morning person, so I make the first decisions of the day on the previous evening. I lay out my clothes and the critical items that I'll need for the next day. As a result, I'm more likely to be out of the house and where I need to be on time.

Downsize your desk. Give me a flat surface, and I will pile paper on it. I can't help myself. And since I can't stop piling, I opted for a small desk. It limits my potential to create paper-based chaos.

Be redundant. I use multiple "alarms" -- setting a clock, programming a cell phone, asking people to call me -- to remind me of things. In theory, any one of these should suffice. In reality, I ignore single reminders, but almost always pay attention to several of them.

Sandy Maynard, ADD/ADHD coach and *ADDitude* contributor



Make it eye-catching. I paste logos of companies on file folders, rather than writing names on them. The colorful logo of Citigroup or Geico is easier to find than a folder with "banking" or "insurance" written in black or red ink.

End paper hoarding. I use a smart phone to hold all my contact information (backed up on my computer automatically with MobileMe). And I enter new phone numbers or changes of address immediately. No scraps of paper or business cards that inevitably get stuck to other scraps of paper that eventually get thrown out.

10-9-8-7... I create a launchpad for items that are entering or leaving the house. I put my keys, purse, and cell phone charger in a basket by the front door. Items that need to be returned to the store or taken with me are placed in plain view next to the launchpad.

Prevent clutter. I collect and sort my mail daily over a recycling wastebasket, so that junk mail doesn't make it to my desk.

Keep closets organized. For every new piece of clothing that I purchase, I get rid of one old item. That means socks with holes in them, too...I don't save them for dusting!

Ben Glenn, of SimpleADHDExpert.com and ADDitudeMag.com blogger

Be a people person. Because my ADD/ADHD brain races all the time, I find it hard to organize my priorities. I have a "sympathetic encourager" -- a special person I trust, who understands the struggles of ADD/ADHD -- to help me separate my wants from my needs and focus on what's important now.

Track time. Tasks that I think will take an hour often take three or four hours. The Time Timer helps me track time's passage by showing me how much of it has lapsed. Since I've used the Time Timer, my daughter hasn't spent the evening at day care because Daddy forgot to pick her up.



Make a meeting place. I often lose my phone, keys, and wallet, and, after hours of looking, I find them in the strangest places (the freezer). To avoid such time-consuming disasters, I created my "essentials" spot, a place that I have trained myself to put all the things I need to have in hand before I leave the house. I use the top of the fridge -- hey, I'm 6'4" -- when at home and the top of the TV when staying in a hotel.

Go smaller. After losing a set of rental-car keys in the depths of my backpack, I decided to downsize to a messenger bag. It has pouches and pockets like a backpack, but, at half the size, it limits what I can keep in there. Its smaller size forces me to ask, "What do I absolutely need to bring with me?"

Go digital for organization. The iPad has organized my life. I no longer have to keep track of my laptop, two iPods, and a PSP. E-mail, blogs, games, movies, music, and calendar are on one device.

Beth Main, ADD/ADHD coach and *ADDitude* contributor

Easy access. I keep items that are used together near each other. For example, the cutting board lives next to the knives. It minimizes running back and forth to get the things I need to do a job. Similarly, I keep stuff that I use regularly (like exercise equipment) easily accessible.

Don't procrastinate. When new paperwork comes into the house (in the mail, from the school, from the doctor), I immediately sort it into Action Required, Might Act On Someday, Reference/Cold Storage, or Trash. The Action Required items go into a bin, and also get entered on my to-do list.

Maintain a to-do list. I keep a master list with everything I intend to do someday, in Microsoft Outlook. (The "Tasks" feature lets me categorize, assign due dates, and reorder things according to priority.) A master to-do list keeps me from forgetting important things, and frees up mental bandwidth, since I don't have to store things in my head.



Use technology to stay organized. I use Google Calendar to track appointments and time-sensitive tasks. I program it to send a text message to my phone to remind me of an appointment. I set up different calendars for different parts of my life: coaching appointments, personal stuff, project milestones. Each is color-coded, and I can display or suppress the calendars individually, depending on what I need to know.

Organize your thoughts. Mind maps (aka graphic organizers) create some semblance of order in my head. They help with making decisions, solving problems, ruminating, or getting started on a writing project. I draw circles and write a few words representing an idea in each one, then connect the circles that are related. I am not a linear thinker, so this technique works well for me.

Ned Hallowell, Founder of the Hallowell Center for Cognitive and Emotional Health, best-selling author, and *ADDitude* contributor



Create a chore file. I write down chores on index cards -- one per card -- and place them in a card file. I meet once a week with my wife to coordinate the priorities for next week, and to figure out who will be doing what. The system helps me do only those chores that my wife and I think are most important, and provides a single location to go to when trying to remember what to do next.

Schedule sex. Disorganization, distraction, and busy lives mean we aren't organized enough for one of the most important activities in our relationship. Set specific dates for sex, then put a reminder (or two!) in your phone or calendar, so you don't forget. What's less romantic: scheduling sex or never having it?!

Chart tough decisions. Feelings of overwhelm and lack of mental organization get in the way of making important decisions, so I create a decisions chart. On a big piece of lined paper, I write the problem at the top and create three columns: Reasons to do, Reasons not to do, Creative ideas. Then, I fill in the three columns with my wife. The chart organizes our thoughts, and increases the likelihood of finding a good solution, because it forces us to work as a team.

Hire an office organizer. At least once a year, I hire a temporary secretary to do all my filing. I provide a basic overview, and I let the organizer go to it.

Create "capture" areas. I create capture spaces for "grabbing" stuff where it enters. Examples: a large mail bin near the front door, along with a key hanger; hat, mitten, and boot boxes in the mudroom; sports equipment cubbies near the back door.

Nancy A. Ratey, Master Certified Coach and author of *The Disorganized Mind*

Get organized ahead of time. I set the table the night before for breakfast, prepare any ingredients ahead of time, and place them in plastic bags. All I have to do the next day is throw them in the pot, pan, or microwave.



Never lose your keys again. I attach my car keys to (or place them near) one of the items that I take with me when running errands -- letters, to-do list, clothes for dry cleaning -- so I don't forget them. Before taking a walk, I place the house keys in my shoes.

Use the Internet to be organized. Two words: online banking. It cuts down on paper to file, and eliminates the need to write down everything I've debited or charged to my account.

Back up your memory. Because I tend to forget things, no matter how important they are, I always tell a close friend where I've hidden a spare key or put a document. I also photocopy the contents of my wallet in case I lose it -- and I probably will.

Don't sweat the small stuff. I file related papers together rather than filing each one alphabetically in its own folder. The Office Equipment folder, for instance, contains the owner's manuals for my printer, computer, and fax machine, along with warranties, repair bills, notices of anti-virus upgrades, and so on.

Keep it portable. I keep only active projects on my desk, in either wire baskets or expandable file folders, so I can carry them around with me when I get bored of working at my desk.

Terry Matlen, Author of *Survival Tips for Women with AD/HD* and director of MomsWithADD.com



Stuff goes here. I use one spiral notebook for brain dumps -- notes, plans, phone numbers, reminders -- instead of scraps of paper that I will lose. I date each page, so I can find important information quickly. Once the book is filled, I date the cover and store it for future reference.

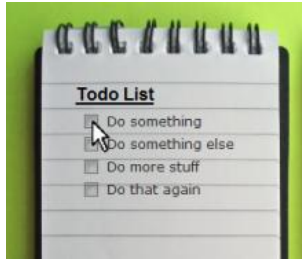
Arrive on time. When heading out for appointments, I focus on the time I need to leave in order to get to my destination on time, not the time of the appointment. Example: I tell myself I have to leave at 1:45 p.m. (for a two o'clock appointment), instead of focusing on 2 p.m.

Don't lose important papers. I keep a small plastic baggy in my purse for receipts and one in my glove compartment for directions.

Memory trick. When ADD/ADHD medications are running low, I turn the bottles upside down in the cabinet as a reminder that I need to call soon for refills.

Michele Novotni, ADD/ADHD coach, therapist, and *ADDitude* contributor

Use this smart storage tip. I label storage containers in the attic, basement, or garage, so I can find them later. I tape an index card, listing all the items in the box, on the side, and update it as needed. I also try to keep like items -- say, kitchen stuff -- together in the same area.



Keep organized in the kitchen. I use Master-Cook software to store and organize my recipes, so I can quickly browse them by title, category, or ingredients. Having recipes on my computer makes it easy to send them to my friends and family.

Stick to two to-do lists. I have an Action List of up to three items to do now, and a Parking Lot of things I want to/need to do. When I finish the Action items, I pull items or parts of items off the Parking Lot list.

This keeps my highest-priority items on the front burner.

Delegate tasks. I hire college kids to file papers and scan documents regularly to help keep papers organized. They love the flexible hours, and I love not having to do it.