

Do the Next Tiny Step

When you are overwhelmed, the whole task can appear in your mind at once. You do not just see the email you need to send; you see the reply, the possible response, the decisions that might follow and everything else waiting behind it. You do not see one household job; you see the entire room, the rest of the house and all the things you have not managed yet. When the brain tries to hold the whole path at once, starting can feel impossible.

You do not need the whole path

The next tiny step is deliberately smaller than the final goal. Its job is not to complete everything. Its job is to give your brain a clear place to begin. Instead of 'sort the paperwork', the step might be 'put the papers on the table'. Instead of 'deal with my emails', it might be 'open the most important message'. Instead of 'make dinner', it could be 'go into the kitchen and look at what is available'.

Why smaller can work

Large instructions contain many hidden decisions. Planning, sequencing, remembering, estimating time and deciding what comes first all use executive-function capacity. When you are stressed, exhausted, anxious, overloaded or burnt out, that capacity may already be stretched. Making the instruction smaller reduces the amount your brain has to organise before movement can begin.

Make the step almost ridiculously small

If your first step still makes you freeze, shrink it again. 'Have a shower' can become 'get a towel'. 'Go for a walk' can become 'put my shoes by the door'. 'Complete the form' can become 'find the form'. 'Clean the kitchen' can become 'put one cup in the sink'. There is no prize for making the first step bigger than it needs to be.

Stop after the step if you need to

A tiny-step approach is not a trick to make you complete the whole task. You are allowed to do the step and stop. Sometimes completing one small action creates enough momentum for another. Sometimes it does not. Both outcomes are valid. The important part is that you have reduced the pressure and made some movement possible.

Notice the language you use with yourself

Words such as 'should', 'must', 'all', 'everything' and 'finish' can quietly increase the size of a task. Try replacing them with language that points only to the next action: 'For now, I am going to...' or 'The next small thing is...'. This can be particularly helpful when shame or self-criticism has become tangled up with procrastination or executive-function difficulties.

Your Tiny-Step Check-In

Choose one thing that currently feels too large. Write it down as you normally describe it. Then ask: what would I physically have to do first? Keep reducing the answer until it feels possible enough to approach.

What is the task?

Name the task without judging yourself for not having completed it. Notice whether the words you use describe one action or an entire chain of actions.

What is hidden inside it?

Break the task apart. A single item on a to-do list may actually contain ten decisions. Naming those hidden steps can explain why something that appears 'simple' has felt difficult to begin.

What is the tiniest useful action?

Choose an action that can be seen and done: open it, find it, place it, write one sentence, drink one glass, send one message, put on one shoe, clear one small space. If that still feels too much, make it smaller.

What happens after that?

Only decide after completing the first step. You might take another tiny step, pause, ask for help, change the plan or stop for now. You do not have to commit to the whole journey before taking the first movement.

Message from Maggie

When something feels enormous, I do not want you to measure yourself against the size of the whole task. Look for the smallest point where you can enter it. Sometimes progress is opening the document. Sometimes it is putting your feet on the floor. Sometimes it is asking someone to sit beside you while you begin. Tiny does not mean meaningless. It means you have found a step your system can manage right now.

When getting started is regularly difficult

Persistent difficulty starting, sequencing or completing everyday tasks can have many causes, including prolonged stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, ADHD, autism, trauma, sleep problems and physical health difficulties. If it is significantly affecting daily life, consider discussing it with a GP, therapist or another appropriate professional so that support can reflect what is actually happening for you.