
Understanding My ADHD

Memory, motivation, organisation and everyday responsibilities

A practical and validating guide for men who know what needs doing, genuinely intend to do it, and still find that everyday responsibilities can disappear from mind or become unexpectedly difficult to begin.

This is not laziness

ADHD can affect the mental processes used to hold information in mind, begin a task, estimate time, switch attention, regulate effort and return to something after an interruption. When these processes are inconsistent, ability can look inconsistent too. You may manage a complicated problem at work and then forget the washing, miss a message or stand in the kitchen unable to decide where to begin. That contrast is real; it is not proof that you do not care.

Many men learn early to hide difficulty behind humour, silence, overworking or last-minute urgency. If other people have called you careless, disorganised or unreliable, you may have started using those words about yourself. Understanding ADHD does not remove responsibility, but it changes the question from “What is wrong with me?” to “What support does my brain need here?” That shift makes practical change more possible.

ADHD does not look identical in every person or on every day. Sleep, stress, sensory load, physical health, interest and the amount of structure around you can all change how accessible a skill feels. Inconsistency is therefore part of what needs understanding. The fact that you completed something yesterday does not automatically mean the same route will be available today; it may mean yesterday provided more urgency, novelty, support or energy.

This guide is educational rather than diagnostic. ADHD can overlap with anxiety, depression, sleep problems, trauma and other conditions. A GP or appropriately qualified clinician can help if symptoms are significantly affecting daily life, work or relationships.

A useful starting thought

You do not need a perfect system. You need a system that remains visible, is easy to restart and does not depend on remembering to remember.

Why everyday responsibilities can feel so difficult

Working memory and the “now/not-now” problem. Working memory is the short-term mental workspace used to hold a plan while acting on it. With ADHD, an intention may be sincere and then vanish when attention moves elsewhere. A task that is not visible can stop feeling active, while something immediate captures the whole foreground. This is why reminders need to appear at the point of action, rather than living in a notebook that must itself be remembered.

Starting is a separate task. Motivation is not simply wanting an outcome. Starting also requires the brain to organise the first movement, tolerate uncertainty and generate enough activation. A vague instruction such as “sort the house” asks the brain to choose among too many possible beginnings. “Put the washing in the machine” gives it a visible doorway. Making the first step smaller is not cheating; it reduces the executive demand.

Time can be hard to feel. Ten minutes, an hour and “later” may not carry a reliable internal sense of distance. A responsibility can therefore remain outside awareness until urgency makes it suddenly real. Visual timers, transition alarms and a short preparation cue can make time external and observable.

Attention follows interest, novelty and urgency. ADHD attention is not an absence of attention. It can be powerful but difficult to direct voluntarily. An engaging activity may create deep focus, while a repetitive task produces little activation. Pairing dull tasks with movement, music, company or a short timed challenge can help, provided the added stimulation does not become a distraction.

Shame consumes capacity. When every missed task becomes evidence of failure, the task carries two loads: the practical action and the emotional threat. Avoidance then increases, followed by more urgency and shame. A neutral reset—“the system stopped working; what needs changing?”—protects the energy needed to begin again.

Notice the pattern, not only the outcome

For one week, notice when a task disappears or stalls. Record where you were, what interrupted you, whether the task was visible, how tired or hungry you were, and what helped you restart. The purpose is not to score your performance. It is to find the conditions in which your brain can access the intention.

Build an external memory system

A useful system takes information out of working memory and places it somewhere dependable. The strongest approach is usually one capture point, one daily view and reminders attached to places or actions. Multiple apps, scraps of paper and mental promises create more locations to search, so begin with the simplest tool you are willing to look at every day.

Choose one capture point. Use one phone list, one small planner or one voice-note inbox for new commitments. Capture the task immediately, including the next action and when it needs attention. “Dentist” is vague; “call dentist at 9am Tuesday—number saved under Dentist” is actionable. Review the capture point at the same anchor each day, such as after breakfast or when plugging in your phone.

Make responsibilities visible where they happen. Keep the laundry basket on the route to the washing machine, cleaning supplies where they are used, and a small exit checklist by the door. A clear labelled container can work better than an attractive closed cupboard if closed storage causes items to disappear from awareness. The goal is not a showroom; it is a home that gives your memory helpful cues.

Link a new action to an existing one. Instead of expecting a task at an abstract time, attach it to something that already happens: start the dishwasher after the evening meal, take the rubbish out when leaving for work, or review tomorrow’s commitments when the phone goes on charge. The existing routine becomes the prompt.

Use two alarms with different jobs. The first alarm means prepare or finish what you are doing. The second means move. Name the alarm with the action—“shoes, keys, leave”—rather than “appointment.” Allow realistic transition time. An alarm that is repeatedly dismissed becomes background noise, so keep reminders purposeful.

Borrow structure from another person. Some people find it easier to begin or continue a task when another person is quietly present. This is sometimes called body doubling. The other person does not have to supervise or complete the task; their presence can make time and intention feel more concrete. This may happen in the same room, on a phone call or during a short agreed online session.

The one-board household system

Create one visible board with only four headings: **Today**, **This week**, **Waiting for** and **Done**. Limit “Today” to three essential actions. Break household jobs into the next visible step and move completed items to “Done” so effort is recorded, not immediately erased. Reset the board once a week with another person if that makes follow-through easier.

Cleaning, washing and commitments

Cleaning: Replace “clean the room” with a repeatable sequence: rubbish, dishes, laundry, items that already have a home, then one surface. Set a ten-minute timer and stop when it ends unless continuing feels genuinely manageable. A short completed cycle builds trust more effectively than an exhausting rescue clean followed by avoidance.

Washing: Treat laundry as several separate tasks—collect, load, move, dry, put away. Put a timer on when the machine starts and label it “move washing.” If folding creates a barrier, use broad open categories or baskets for items that do not need folding. A workable method is more valuable than following a household rule that consistently defeats you.

Appointments and promises: Enter a commitment while the conversation is happening. Include travel time and a preparation alert. If someone asks you to remember something at home, ask them to send it or capture it in front of them. This is not indifference; it is a reasonable support for working memory.

When the plan breaks: Expect interruptions, illness, low-energy days and periods when the system becomes invisible. Write a minimum version in advance: essential medication, one meal, urgent messages, clean clothes for tomorrow and one five-minute reset. Restart from today rather than trying to clear every backlog first.

My responsibility map

Responsibility	What usually gets in the way?	External cue or smaller first step
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Choose one responsibility to redesign this week. A small system that you use is stronger than a detailed system that depends on a perfect day.

Confidence, communication and self-trust

Confidence often becomes low after years of forgetting, lateness, unfinished tasks or criticism. You may assume that a future plan will fail because previous systems did. Rebuilding confidence does not require pretending everything is easy. It begins by making smaller promises, supporting them properly and noticing evidence of follow-through.

Use language that describes the difficulty without turning it into your identity. “I lost track of that task” is accurate and leaves room for repair. “I am useless” is a global judgement that offers no next step. Accountability can sound like: “I said I would do this and it did not happen. I understand the impact. I am putting it into our shared reminder now and I will update you by six.”

In relationships, forgetting can be interpreted as not listening or not caring. Explain the difference between intention and recall, while also agreeing on a system that reduces the burden on your partner. Shared calendars, written requests and a weekly ten-minute household check-in can help. The aim is not for another person to manage you; it is to make agreements visible to both of you.

Self-trust grows from evidence, not pressure. Keep a brief record of repairs as well as successes: the message you answered after forgetting, the washing you restarted, the appointment you rearranged and the moment you told the truth instead of hiding a mistake. Repair is a responsible action. It deserves to count when you assess whether you are changing.

A weekly evidence check

Three questions
1. What did I remember or complete, even if it was late or imperfect?
2. What support, cue or condition helped?
3. What is one promise small enough to keep next week?

If anger, anxiety, depression, trauma, sleep difficulty or thoughts of self-harm are present, seek appropriate professional support rather than assuming every struggle is ADHD. In England, a GP can discuss assessment and treatment routes. For urgent help, use NHS 111 and select the mental health option where available; call 999 or attend A&E; if there is immediate danger.

A message from Maggie

If you have spent years believing you should be able to manage these things without help, it can feel exposing to admit how difficult everyday responsibilities have become. Your struggle is not cancelled out by the things you do well. You deserve systems that fit the way your mind works, space to understand what has happened to your confidence, and support that does not begin with blame. Start with one pressure point, one visible change and one promise you can realistically keep. Progress can be quiet and still be real.

Your practical reset plan

Use this page to create a system you can begin today. Keep the plan visible and review it after one week. If it fails, change the design rather than using the failure as evidence against yourself.

My one capture point

I will capture new tasks and commitments in:

I will review it after this existing daily action:

My three visible cues

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

My minimum-day plan

When I am overwhelmed or exhausted, the responsibilities that genuinely cannot wait are:

The first five-minute action will be:

Books and further reading

Taking Charge of Adult ADHD by Russell A. Barkley - a structured, practical guide to understanding ADHD and strengthening everyday self-management.

Smart but Scattered Guide to Success by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare - tools for identifying executive-function difficulties and building targeted supports.

ADHD 2.0 by Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey - an accessible overview of ADHD strengths, challenges and supportive approaches. Books are suggestions for exploration, not a substitute for individual clinical advice.

Reliable information and clinical references

NICE. *Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: diagnosis and management (NG87)*. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng87>

NHS. *Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)*. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/>

Royal College of Psychiatrists. *ADHD in adults*.

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/mental-illnesses-and-mental-health-problems/adhd-in-adults>

ADHD Foundation. Adult resources and information. <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/>

This resource offers psychoeducation and practical reflection. It does not diagnose ADHD or replace medical, psychological or occupational advice.