A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Living Well With Dyscalculia

Practical strategies that actually help | Understanding numerical load and choosing accessible ways to manage it

You do not need to do numbers the hard way

Dyscalculia can affect number sense, calculation, estimating, sequencing and remembering numerical information. The difficulty is not a lack of effort or intelligence. Everyday tasks may require repeated checking, more time or different tools. A good adjustment reduces the load while keeping you in control.

THE NUMERICAL LOAD: HOW A TASK BECOMES OVERWHELMING

1. Notice
A number appears

2. Process
Interpret or calculate

3. Hold
Remember the result

4. Act
Make a decision

The accessibility principle

Externalise, simplify, check. Put numbers where you can see them; break tasks into clear steps; and use a reliable way to check the outcome. A calculator, written prompt, reminder or trusted second check is a support tool, not a shortcut.

Externalise

Write down amounts, dates and steps. Use visual calendars, labels, photos and saved templates so you do not have to hold everything in working memory.

Simplify

Use one action at a time, consistent routines, pre-set amounts and familiar formats. Ask for written instructions and clear numerical information.

Check

Pause before paying, booking or submitting. Compare figures with the original source and use a checklist or confirmation screen.

Keep control

You choose which supports help. Asking someone to clarify a number does not mean giving up responsibility for the decision.

A helpful starting question

Instead of asking, “Why can’t I do this quickly?”, ask: “Which part of this task creates the most numerical effort, and what could carry that part for me?”

EVERYDAY STRATEGIES

Money, Time & Daily Tasks

Practical systems for shopping, bills, appointments, cooking and keeping track of numbers

Money and shopping

- Use a calculator or shopping-list app for totals.
- Compare unit prices rather than relying on mental estimates.
- Set spending alerts and automate predictable bills.
- Check payee, amount and date before confirming payment.

Time and appointments

- Use digital calendars with two alerts.
- Add travel and preparation time as separate blocks.
- Keep a consistent date format, e.g. 02 Nov 2026.
- Ask for appointment details in writing.

A SIMPLE APPOINTMENT SYSTEM

BOOK
Copy date, time and place

PREPARE
Add travel and items needed

REMIND
Set alerts before leaving

CONFIRM
Check details on the day

Cooking and measurements

- Choose recipes with grams or millilitres clearly listed.
- Measure with marked jugs and digital scales.
- Prepare ingredients before starting.
- Use timers for each stage, not one overall estimate.

Travel and journeys

- Save routes and platform details as screenshots.
- Use live journey updates and step-by-step navigation.
- Allow a buffer for transfers and changes.
- Check ticket dates and return times before paying.

Long numbers, codes and telephone details

Break sequences into small groups, copy rather than retype where safe, and use secure password managers or autofill where appropriate. When reading a number aloud, ask the other person to repeat it in groups. For bank details or important codes, verify against the original source rather than memory.

Build a reliable checking routine

Use the same short sequence each time: read → enter → compare → confirm. For important money, travel or medication-related information, allow extra time and ask for a second check when needed.

Tools, Adjustments & Confidence

Make information accessible without losing autonomy or having to hide your needs

Work and study: make the method accessible

Numerical tasks can be easier when expectations are explicit and information remains visible. Helpful adjustments may include written instructions, worked examples, calculators, spreadsheets with protected formulas, extra processing time, consistent templates, and a quiet space for checking.

At work

Ask for written figures after meetings, clear deadlines, labelled spreadsheets, accessible training and a chance to verify numerical entries before submission.

In education

Request step-by-step demonstrations, visual examples, permission to use appropriate tools, accessible assessments and time to check calculations.

MATCH THE DIFFICULTY TO THE SUPPORT

Remembering dates	Calendar with two reminders
Estimating costs	Calculator + spending limit
Following sequences	Numbered written steps
Reading long numbers	Group digits + verify source
Fear of making mistakes	Pause, check, ask for clarification

When numbers trigger anxiety

Past criticism or repeated mistakes can make numerical situations feel threatening. Anxiety may then reduce concentration and working-memory capacity, making the task harder. This is a cycle, not a personal failure. The aim is to create enough safety and clarity to complete the task at your own pace.

Unclear number

Worry increases

Stress response

Focus narrows

Mistake or delay

Confidence drops

A calmer response

Stop and name the exact numerical step. Use a familiar tool, work through one step at a time, and check the result. If you need help, ask for clarification of the information rather than someone taking over the whole task.

PRINTABLE REFLECTION & ACTION PLAN

My Personal Strategy Map

Use this page to identify difficult tasks, select practical supports and create a repeatable plan

1 | Identify one situation

Choose a real situation: paying a bill, planning a journey, reading a timetable, measuring ingredients or completing a numerical task at work.

The situation I want to make easier:

2 | Notice the sticking point

Is the hardest part reading numbers, remembering them, calculating, estimating, sequencing, managing time, or worrying about making a mistake?

What happens, and when do I notice it?

3 | Choose one or two supports

Think about tools and changes that reduce the load: calculator, visual prompt, written steps, two reminders, a template, extra time, or checking with someone.

My tools, adjustments or people I can ask:

4 | Make a simple before–during–after plan

A predictable routine can help prevent overload and make the next task easier to approach.

BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
Gather information, tools and time	Follow one step at a time	Verify, save and note what worked

My next small step and when I will try it:

Remember: Independence means making informed choices with the support that works for you. You do not have to complete every numerical task mentally, quickly or without assistance.