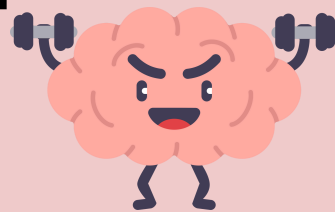




How to Begin Working Out Consistently with an ADHD Lens



Struggling to maintain a workout routine is common, especially for individuals with ADHD. Many start with high motivation but quickly lose interest, fall off track, and feel guilty. This guide provides an ADHD friendly approach to building a sustainable, adaptable, and enjoyable movement routine that aligns with how your brain works.

Understanding ADHD and Exercise Challenges

Interest Driven Motivation:

ADHD brains are fueled by interest and novelty. Once an activity feels repetitive or mundane, motivation dwindles.

Dopamine Deficiency:

ADHD individuals seek dopamine stimulation. If an activity doesn't provide enough immediate satisfaction, it's hard to stay engaged.

Discomfort Avoidance:

The anticipation of struggle or exhaustion makes it difficult to start workouts.

All or Nothing Thinking:

If workouts don't fit into an idealized, structured plan, it often leads to skipping altogether.

Comparing to Others:

Fitness influencers make consistency seem effortless, creating unrealistic expectations and self-doubt

Redefining Workout Consistency for ADHD

Traditional fitness advice prioritizes rigid consistency, this doesn't work for many ADHD brains. Instead, redefine consistency as **regular movement, not identical workouts**. Flexibility in approach ensures sustainability.

ADHD-Friendly Fitness Principles

1

Consistency means movement, not routines

2

Adaptability over rigidity

3

Novelty keeps engagement high

4

Interest based activities improve adherence

Step 1: Build a Movement Menu

A movement menu offers **options** based on daily energy levels, preventing all or nothing thinking.

Low Energy Days (Minimum effort)

- 5-10 min stretching
- Walking the dog
- Playing with kids/pets
- Gentle yoga

Moderate Energy Days (Standard workouts)

- 30-min home workout
- Jogging or light cardio
- Weight training
- Online fitness classes

High Energy Days (Max effort)

- Intense gym sessions
- HIIT workouts
- Rock climbing, dance, or martial arts
- Signing up for a workout challenge



Each day, **choose from your movement menu** based on how you feel. The goal is movement, not perfection.

Think smart not harder, use AI like ChatGPT to create your movement menus for you!

Step 2: Use Habit Stacking

Habit stacking helps incorporate workouts into daily routines, reducing decision fatigue.

Set physical alarms using a calendar or smart devices like Alexa, so you're not relying on your brain to do the heavy lifting. Our working memory has its limits, let technology handle the reminders



How to Implement Habit Stacking

Morning Workouts:

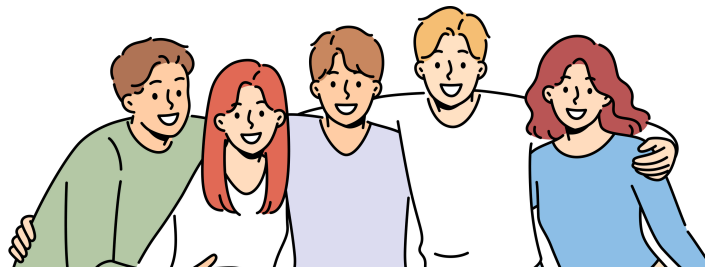
Place workout clothes in the bathroom for immediate access after waking up.

After Work Habit:

Change into workout gear right after logging off work.

Before Meals:

Do movement before dinner as a trigger to stay active.



Step 3: Build Accountability for ADHD Success

Accountability **enhances motivation** and prevents inconsistency.

Ways to Stay Accountable:

- **Social Accountability**
 - Workout with a friend (in person or via Zoom)
 - Join a fitness challenge
 - Sign up for a race or event
- **Public Commitments**
 - Share progress/goals with friends
 - Use fitness tracking apps (Apple Watch, Fitbit)
 - Enroll in structured programs

Step 4: Allow Interest Based Transitions

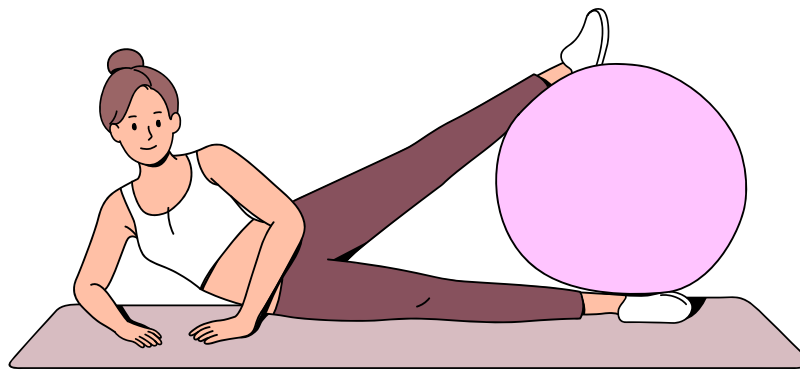
Your fitness interests will shift. Instead of resisting change, **embrace the transition** by switching to a new form of movement that excites you.

How to Handle Workout Shifts:

1. **Recognize Interest Drop Off** – Ask: Am I just having a bad day, or is this activity no longer engaging?
2. **Follow the Dopamine** – Seek activities that match your evolving interest (e.g., from weightlifting to boxing).
3. **Honor the Shift** – Adapt your movement plan to keep engagement high.

Step 5: Act on Impulsive Motivation

When the urge to move strikes, **act immediately**, even if just for 10 minutes. Small, spontaneous movements build momentum and reinforce consistency.



Key Takeaways:

Create a movement menu to match your energy levels.

Use habit stacking to make workouts automatic.

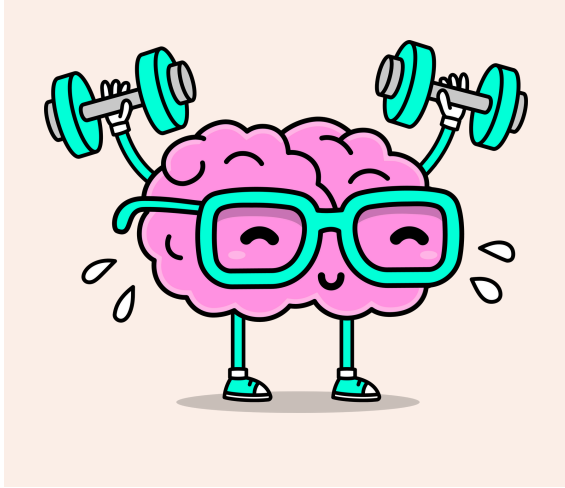
Leverage accountability to stay motivated.

Accept shifting interests and adapt workouts accordingly.

Act on movement impulses to reinforce consistency.



Final Motivation: Stop Being Afraid to Try



Fear of being perceived as a beginner holds many back. Every fitness journey starts with the first step.

- You don't have to be perfect; you just have to start.
- Trying new activities is about self-care, not perfection.
- You're doing this for **yourself**, and that's something to be proud of!

Reminders

You are not incapable, your brain just wasn't built for a neurotypical world. The struggle isn't you; it's the expectations that weren't designed with you in mind.

Work **with** your ADHD, not against it. Set up systems that fit *your* brain, not someone else's. That's where success happens.



ADHD is experienced on a spectrum so be kind to yourself as you explore what approaches work best for you!

All information in this PDF is sourced from empirical research and clinical observations by Leann Borneman, LCSW, CST.

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