

Executive Functioning Strategies for Adults PDF

1. Working Memory Strategies

- Use external memory aids (planners, sticky notes, whiteboards, apps).
- Create a daily “brain dump” or open-loop capture routine.
- Use checklists for multi-step tasks.
- Reduce working memory load by breaking tasks into smaller steps.
- Pair verbal information with written reminders.
- Use visual cues such as color-coding, icons, or symbols.
- Repeat instructions or information back to yourself to reinforce them.

2. Planning & Prioritization Strategies

- Start with a weekly planning session rather than daily planning.
- Use “must do / should do / could do / not today” categorization.
- Break large tasks into micro-steps with clear next actions.
- Forecast upcoming deadlines by mapping tasks into a weekly timeline.
- Review priorities at the same time each week for consistency.
- Use time-blocking to define when tasks will happen.
- Identify the “one thing” that would make the biggest impact today.

3. Organization Strategies

- Create designated “homes” for commonly used items.
- Use bins, trays, and labeled containers to reduce visual chaos.
- Keep surfaces as clear as possible to reduce sensory load.
- Do a 5-minute nightly reset to maintain organization.

- Digitize paper whenever possible to reduce clutter.
- Use color-coding for categories (work, home, finances, etc.).

4. Task Initiation Strategies

- Use micro-starts: commit to 2 minutes or one tiny step.
- Reduce friction (lay out materials, simplify setup, prepare environment).
- Pair starting a task with a cue (timer, playlist, body double session).
- Use structured routines to remove decision fatigue.
- Identify emotional barriers (“What am I avoiding and why?”).
- Use implementation intentions: *“If it’s 3 pm, then I start the laundry.”*

5. Time Management Strategies

- Estimate how long tasks will take and compare with actual time afterward.
- Use timers, alarms, and visual clocks to create external time anchors.
- Break your day into blocks (morning, mid-day, evening).
- Use backwards planning from deadlines.
- Limit task sessions to realistic time windows to avoid burnout.
- Use “transition rituals” when starting or switching tasks.
- Track energy levels and plan tasks around your natural peaks.

6. Emotional Regulation Strategies

- Use halftime check-ins to identify overwhelm early.
- Name the emotion before making a plan.

- Practice grounding techniques (breathing, sensory tools, cold water, etc.).
- Use scripts for shutdown, overwhelm, or panic moments.
- Build in decompression time during transitions.
- Reframe setbacks (“This is information, not failure.”).
- Identify shame triggers related to productivity or expectations.

7. Cognitive Flexibility Strategies

- Create multiple “acceptable” outcomes instead of one perfect one.
- Use “Plan A / Plan B / Plan C” thinking.
- Shift tasks across the week without guilt when needed.
- Challenge black-and-white thinking (“What’s a 70% version of this?”).
- Use curiosity (“What would this look like if it didn’t have to be perfect?”).
- Give yourself permission to change course when new information appears.

8. Impulse Control Strategies

- Use a pause cue before reacting (breathing pattern, grounding).
- Write things down before responding to emotional triggers.
- Create buffer time before decisions or purchases.
- Use physical barriers (put phone in another room, block apps).
- Practice “urge surfing” to let impulses rise and fall without acting.
- Set clear internal rules (“I reply to messages after 5 minutes, not immediately”).

9. Perseverance / Task Persistence Strategies

- Use momentum-based planning instead of perfection-based planning.
- Celebrate small wins and micro-progress.
- Track progress visually (habit trackers, check marks, streaks).
- Pair tedious tasks with preferred stimuli (music, TV, body doubling).

- Break tasks into shorter sessions to reduce fatigue.
- Use rewards that reinforce effort, not just outcomes.

10. Self-Monitoring Strategies

- End each day with a 3-minute “What worked? What didn’t?” review.
- Notice physical signals of dysregulation or shutdown.
- Track patterns (energy, mood, sleep) to understand capacity.
- Use reflection prompts to adjust next week’s plan.
- Set reminders to inspect your progress throughout the day.

11. Environmental Modification Strategies

- Reduce sensory overload (lighting, sound, clutter, smells).
- Use task-specific zones (work zone, rest zone, cleaning zone).
- Make frequently used tools visible and accessible.
- Remove friction by prepping supplies ahead of time.
- Keep a “launch pad” for keys, bags, and essentials.