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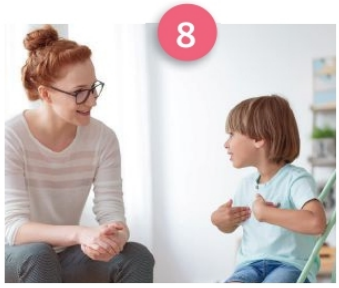
LIVING WELL WITH ADHD
DECEMBER 2019
Support Your Future Thinking Skills
• choose the right apps
• use digital *and* paper calendars
What's a Comprehensive Assessment?
Feeling Comfortable at the Dentist
Mindfulness and Emotions
Cultivate Reading for Pleasure
Truths About Adult ADHD

CONTENTS

December 2019 • Volume 26, No. 6



FEATURES

FOR PARENTS & EDUCATORS

8 What's a Comprehensive Assessment and How Could It Help My Child?
by Katherine Quie, PhD, LP
For starters, testing clarifies a child's unique learning and mental health needs.

12 ADHD and Dental Care: Guidance for Parents and Caregivers
by Greg Grillo, DDS
Their introduction to dentistry sets the tone for how youngsters with ADHD relate to oral healthcare for the rest of their lives.

16 How Can I Get My Child to Read for Pleasure?
by Cheryl Gedzelman
Books that we love are jewels that bring both joy and success throughout our lives.

19 "You're On Your Own!"
by Margaret Foster, MAEd
A learning specialist shares an approach to leading students from supported instruction to responsible independence.

LIFESPAN

22 Mindfulness, ADHD, and Managing Emotions
by Mark Bertin, MD
New research reflects the complexity of both mindfulness and ADHD, while measuring improvements in behavior and emotion.

25 Three Things I Know to Be True About ADHD in Adults
by Laura MacNiven
ADHD is an important part of who I am. It's just not *who* I am.

27 Choose the Right Apps
by Carey A. Heller, PsyD
Here's a guide to finding the best combination for thriving in your busy ADHD life.

30 Support Your Future Thinking Skills
by Marydee Sklar
Find out what the hottest new time-management tool can do for you.

Choose the Right Apps

by Carey A. Heller, PsyD

THANKS TO ALL THE ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY and the portability of smartphones and tablets, there are now more resources than ever before available to help adults with ADHD keep track of appointments, use to-do lists, meditate, and get lots of notifications to remind them to follow through on every aspect of daily living. Some adults with ADHD find it takes a combination of apps to help themselves.

Sam, a 35-year-old married man with two small children, manages his busy, active life with the following apps:

- Calendar: iCalendar
- Task list: Reminders app connected to iCalendar app; shared list with wife
- Sleep: Bedtime app
- Notes: Notes app
- Mindfulness: Headspace

Aubrey, a 42-year-old single mother of two teenagers, keeps it all together with the following combination:

- Calendar/Task list: gTasks
  - Shared task list with kids
- Sleep: Sleep As Android

How about you—are you already dizzy over all the available choices? It can be extremely difficult to identify the apps—as well as the ideal combination of apps—that would work best. The following suggestions can help you assemble the right combination of apps to best manage your life with ADHD.

ISTOCK / LIGHTCOME

General principles of app selection

The following four guiding principles will help you select apps that actually work for you.

Limit the number of different apps that you use to keep organized to the extent that is feasible. If you have a work calendar app, home calendar app, family calendar app, home to-do list app, work to-do list app, shared family to-do list app, this will result in having to keep up with many apps/notifications, which can be confusing and increases the likelihood in not following through on things.

Decide which types of items are helpful to use together in one app. For example, some people like to use one calendar app that includes their work calendar, personal calendar, and shared family calendar. Similarly, some individuals like to have separate lists within one task list app for work and personal items. Others find it easier to have different apps for each to-do list.

Combining several different items such as a calendar, task list, and notes into one app can be very useful for some individuals. This obviously cuts down on the number of different apps to keep track of. On the other hand, some people find an all-inclusive app to be overwhelming.

It is often easier to use apps that sync seamlessly with Google or Apple products, which simplifies importing calendar/task list items and sharing them across devices and with other people. For example, if you use a random calendar app that does not sync with Google or Apple calendars, it will likely be difficult if you want to share an event with someone else or accept a Google Calendar invitation from a colleague or family member.

Things to consider when choosing specific types of apps

While one can choose apps to do almost anything these days, here are some considerations that pertain to the more commonly used types of apps to help you choose the right kind of app for each purpose.

Calendar: Decide how you want to view calendar events.

- Do you like to see events as a list with the times noted next to it?
- Is it more helpful to view events as blocks of time?
- Is having a good daily, weekly, or monthly view of events important to you?
- Would you like to be able to view events in different colors based on category (i.e., personal, work)?

Tasks: Think about how you want to view tasks.

- Do you want to view all tasks on a single page?
- Would you like the ability to create subtasks?

Specific Apps to Consider

When most people think about choosing apps to help them organize and manage their lives, they simply look at lists of apps rather than first focusing on what actual features they want or need.

Now that you're thinking about what to look for in apps, here are suggestions for specific apps to consider in the categories mentioned in the article.

Note that this list is not exhaustive. Apps do change over time, so features not currently available may potentially be added at a later date.

CALENDAR

- **Google Calendar** | **www.google.com/calendar/about** | Apple, Android, Mac, PC
  - › View events in blocks of time or list formats
  - › Syncs with most other calendar apps
- **Apple Calendar** | **support.apple.com/en-ca/guide/calendar/welcome/mac** | Apple devices
  - › View events in blocks of time or list formats

COMBINED CALENDAR/TASK LIST

- **iCalendar** | **apps.apple.com/us/app/icalendar/id492076105** | iPhone, iPad
  - › Connects with the Reminders app to show task list items on the calendar
  - › Can also view tasks on a separate list
  - › Syncs with most other calendar programs
  - › Several options for viewing events in different ways (i.e., blocks of time)
- **Fantastical 2** | **flexibits.com/fantastical** | iPhone, iPad, Mac
  - › Lists calendar and task list events in a list
  - › Can organize tasks by categories
- **gTasks** | **apps.apple.com/us/app/gtasks/id428249408** | Apple, Android, Mac
  - › Lists tasks in one section and calendar events in another one on the same page
- **Calendars5** | **apps.apple.com/us/app/calendars-5-by-readdle/id697927927** | iPhone, iPad
  - › Can view events in blocks of time or list
  - › Tasks appear at top of calendar each day

TASK LIST

- **Reminders app** | **apps.apple.com/us/app/reminders/id1108187841** | iPhone, iPad, Mac
  - › Create separate lists for each category
  - › App automatically generates daily to-do list in scheduled section for each day with ability to view daily schedule

- Would it be helpful to view tasks by category (i.e., work, personal)?
- Do you find it overwhelming to view all tasks at once? If so, would having an app that creates a daily to-do list for you be helpful so you can just focus on tasks that should be completed that day?
- Would it be useful to view tasks on your calendar so that you can schedule time to complete items around your events for the day?
- Do you prefer to have tasks on your calendar, but listed at the top or bottom all together instead of at scheduled times?

Notes: Consider how you use or could use a notes app.

- Do you want a notes app to quickly jot down things to remember?
- Would it be helpful if the notes app allowed you to set reminders to view it?
- Would it be useful to organize notes into folders for easier reference later?
- Do you want to be able to share notes with other people easily?

Health or Mindfulness: Think about what you could be using apps to remind you to do or actually do regarding health or mindfulness practices.

- Would you like an app to use to meditate/do mindfulness daily and remind you to do it?
- Would using an app to remind you to go to bed at a set time and track your sleep be useful?
- Regarding food, would it be helpful to use an app to track your food intake for purposes of being more mindful about what you eat, to lose weight, or ensure that you are getting sufficient nutrients?

Hopefully by now you're getting a clearer sense of what to look for in apps. Take some time to think about what features you want. I highly recommend that you write down those items. Then, download some of the apps suggested in the sidebar, or look at pictures online to get a feel for how they work. Next, try out the apps you've selected. Remember that while having the framework of an app can be useful, it is ultimately how you use the app that ensures your success with it.

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- **Do!** | apps.apple.com/us/app/do-simple-to-do-list/id421819675 | iPhone, iPad
  - › Create simple list of all tasks in one place
  - › Can use folders to organize tasks if desired
  - › Very simple and straightforward to use
- **Google Tasks** | apps.apple.com/us/app/google-tasks-get-things-done/id1353634006 | iPhone, Android, Mac, PC
  - › Built into Gmail so you can view tasks on the computer in the same window as your email account.
  - › Can click a button to add details from email to task list.
  - › On mobile devices, can use Google Tasks app.

NOTES

- **Notes** | apps.apple.com/us/app/notes/id1110145109 | iPhone, iPad, Mac
  - › Write simple notes
  - › Use checklist button to make checklists and can then mark off items when complete
  - › By typing in a date, can click link to create calendar event from the note.
- **MobisleNotes** | www.mobislenotes.com | Apple, Android, Mac, PC
  - › Options to write notes or create a checklist
  - › Can set notifications for reminders
  - › Can easily share notes with other people

HEALTH/MINDFULNESS

- **Bedtime feature on Alarm Clock app** | support.apple.com/en-us/HT208655 | iPhone, iPad
  - › Get daily reminder to go to bed at a set time based on how much sleep you want to get and when you have to wake up in the morning.
  - › Tracks sleep.
- **Sleep as Android** | sleep.urbandroid.org | Android
  - › Get daily reminder about bedtime.
  - › Tracks sleep.
- **Lose it** | www.loseit.com | iPhone, iPad, Android, Mac, PC
  - › Tracks food intake for calories, carbohydrates, and other nutrients.
- **Headspace** | www.headspace.com | iPhone, iPad, Android
  - › Mindfulness app program that provides alerts to meditate.
- **The Mindfulness App** | themindfulnessapp.com | iPhone, iPad
  - › Mindfulness app with timed sessions and the option to set daily alerts to use the app.