

ADHD - OPTIMIZED

ADHD **Habit** Building

Why "Just Do It" Fails (And What Actually Works)

Core Truth: *You are not broken. Your brain does not automate boring behavior. Most "habits" for ADHD remain manual unless engineered differently.*

10

CONCEPTS

1

FORMULA

0

WILLPOWER REQUIRED

@@BrainBrakebab



1. "I Have No Habits" Is a Misdiagnosis

What's actually happening inside your head.

TL;DR

You DO have habits. Your brain just can't run them on autopilot. Every action takes conscious effort. You're driving stick while others are on cruise control.

NEUROTYPICAL BRAIN

Offloads repeated tasks to autopilot

Habits become unconscious over time

"I just do it without thinking"

ADHD BRAIN

Stays in manual mode for everything

Every action requires conscious effort

"I have to decide to do it every single time"

WHY this matters: Stop blaming yourself for "not having discipline." Your brain literally works differently. The fix isn't trying harder. It's engineering around the limitation.



2. Habits Die Without Immediate Reward

Delayed payoff = no dopamine = dead habit.

THE RULE

If it doesn't pay immediately, your brain won't invest. "Future benefits" don't register for ADHD brains. Dopamine teaches repetition. No dopamine = no repeat.



WHY "IT'LL BE WORTH IT LATER" FAILS

"Exercise now, feel good in 3 months" is invisible to your brain. You need reward NOW. Not next week. Not "eventually." Right now, while you're still doing the thing.



3. Pavlov Beats Willpower

Bribe first, moralize later.

THE MOVE

Pair every habit with an immediate, physical reward.

Reward creates the neural loop. Logic does not. Candy beats discipline for building new behavior. You can remove the reward later, after the loop is wired.

HABIT

PAIRED REWARD

Keys in the right spot	Piece of candy
Take meds	Favorite drink
Brush teeth	Fancy toothpaste you actually like
Start work task	Put on a specific playlist

Habit I want to build: _____

Reward I'll pair with it: _____



4. Habit Stacking Often Backfires

Two hard things = zero things done.

TL ; DR

Stacking increases cognitive load. One missed step kills the whole chain. Only stack onto something already automatic. Otherwise, decouple.

✗ THIS BACKFIRES

"After I wake up, I'll meditate, journal, stretch, and make breakfast"

4 new behaviors chained together

Miss one step = abandon all

✓ THIS WORKS

"After I pee (already automatic), I'll take my meds"

1 new behavior attached to autopilot

Miss it = try again tomorrow, no chain broken

Something I already do automatically: _____

ONE thing I'll attach to it: _____



5. External Triggers Replace Internal Memory

Your brain won't remind you. Stop expecting it to.

TL ; DR

Working memory is unreliable under load. Reminders must be physical and visible. Don't rely on "I'll remember." You won't.



Tools That Actually Work

- **Whiteboard on your bag** (visible when you grab it)
- **Items blocking the door** (can't leave without seeing them)
- **Handwritten notes in line of sight** (not phone notifications, those get dismissed)
- **Put tomorrow's task ON your keyboard/desk** (physically in the way)

WHY physical > digital: Phone notifications train your brain to swipe-dismiss. A physical object blocking your path can't be swiped away.



6. Easy Versions Are Not Cheating

Lower friction = higher consistency.

"Sometimes" beats "never." Every time.

Steps create resistance. ADHD brains avoid friction. The easier version that you actually do is infinitely better than the perfect version you skip.

✗ THE "RIGHT" WAY

✓ THE ADHD WAY

Full 10-step skincare routine

Face wipes on the nightstand

Brush teeth for 2 full minutes

Brush for 20 seconds (still way better than skipping)

Meal prep on Sundays

Grocery delivery + heat-and-eat options

Full workout at the gym

One squat. Literally one.



Feeling stuck? Remember this:

The real skill is restarting without punishment. Scroll down to the formula on the next page.



7. Shame Destroys Habit Loops

Failure = pain = avoidance. Break the cycle.

TL;DR

ADHD brains avoid discomfort. Shame teaches quitting, not learning. Restarting feels emotionally expensive, so most people just stop. The fix is removing punishment from the restart.

THE SHAME CYCLE

Miss a day → feel terrible

"I ruined my streak" → give up entirely

Avoidance becomes the new habit

THE RESTART CYCLE

Miss a day → neutral restart

"Streaks don't matter, loops do" → try again

Restarting becomes the new skill



The Rule

The real skill is restarting without punishment.

Not maintaining a streak. Not being consistent. Just: noticing you stopped, and starting again without beating yourself up. That's it. That's the whole skill.



8. ADHD Habits Are Loops, Not Autopilot

Rename the game. You're not building autopilot. You're stabilizing loops.

THE ADHD HABIT FORMULA

[Trigger] → [Tiny Action] → [Immediate Reward]

Autonomy comes later. Loops train behavior first. Habits = stabilized loops.

Build your first loop:

Trigger: _____ (something that already happens every day)

Tiny Action: _____ (embarrassingly small version)

Immediate Reward: _____ (something your brain actually wants)



COMMON MISTAKE

Making the "tiny action" too big. "Do 10 pushups" is not tiny. "Do 1 pushup" is tiny. "Put on gym shoes" is even better. If you feel resistance, make it smaller.



9. Routines Beat Individual Habits

One mode switch instead of five separate decisions.

TL;DR

Routines reduce context switching. "I am in the bathroom" is one trigger that covers multiple actions. You choose one mode, not five tasks.



Your Minimum Viable Routine

Pick ONE location. Attach the bare minimum. Anything beyond this is bonus.

Example: Bathroom routine

- Brush teeth (even 20 seconds)
- Wipe face
- Take meds
- Deodorant

Anything more is optional.

My location trigger: _____

My minimum (2-3 things max):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



10. Start Painfully Small

Embarrassingly small works. That's the point.

THE PRINCIPLE

ADHD overestimates effort. Tiny actions bypass resistance. Momentum comes after starting, not before.

"NORMAL" VERSION	ADHD VERSION	WHY IT WORKS
Brush teeth 2 min	20 seconds	Still brushed. Streak alive.
Clean the kitchen	Wash one dish	Started. Often does more.
Answer all emails	Open inbox, reply to one	Broke the avoidance wall.

WHY: The hardest part is always starting. Once you're doing the thing, your brain often keeps going. But it won't keep going from the couch. One squat gets you off the couch.



High-Leverage ADHD Habit Rules

Screenshot this page. Tape it somewhere visible.

✗ OLD BELIEF	✓ NEW RULE
Consistency is the goal	Restarting is the goal
Discipline builds habits	Dopamine builds habits
Perfect streaks matter	Gentle persistence matters
Hard = effective	Easy = sustainable
Just push through	Engineer around it
Remember to do it	Make it impossible to forget

REMEMBER THE FORMULA

[Trigger] → [Tiny Action] → [Immediate Reward]

Everything in this guide maps back to this one loop.

✓ Your Starter Checklist

- ☐ Pick ONE habit to build (not three, not five. One.)
- ☐ Make it embarrassingly small
- ☐ Pair it with an immediate reward
- ☐ Attach it to an existing trigger (something already automatic)
- ☐ Set up a physical, visible reminder (not a phone notification)
- ☐ When you miss a day, restart without shame
- ☐ After 2 weeks of the tiny version, consider making it slightly bigger

✓ FINAL REMINDER

You're not building discipline. You're building a loop. The loop does the work. You just set it up and protect it. That's the whole game.

@E@BrainBrakesLab

ADHD Habit Building v1.0