



AN ADHD UPLIFTED SERIES

THE SUMMER SLIDE

Are you sliding into July or getting stuck?

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Summer is supposed to bring fun - weekend barbecues, time on the lake, floating in the pool, family vacations, and more. The days are long with high expectations.

You likely still have a full plate at work, and now with the summer distraction of "fun," the important things may have you stuck. Your ADHD symptoms may flare. Routines fall off.

Having an ADHD brain style can make sliding through life downright painful at times. Summertime can disrupt any routine that is in place. And then you fall off the bandwagon.



There are moments of smoothness, and then, when ADHD symptoms flare, it can be sticky and painful. Your systems set you up for a smooth ride through life.

I remember one summer playing on an old playground with my cousins as a kid. It had a giant metal slide with a steep ladder to the top. Not only did it take courage to climb to the top, but I had to position myself just right from the stairs to the platform without falling. The kids around me sat on sacks on the way down. I was hot and sweaty, wearing shorts. Needless to say, I learned quickly that slides are not much fun when you don't have proper clothing or a sack to sit on. Living with ADHD is much the same. You need to learn how to equip yourself with tools, systems, and support that set your brain up for success, and most importantly, these need to be tailored to your unique brain design.



For many, summertime changes the flow of the day. You might squeeze more into the daylight hours and lean into the late hours with late-night fun. You could often fall off your routines and healthy habits, indulging in unhealthy food and drinks, stealing from your sleep, or changing your routines, leaving your system less energized. It doesn't seem like a big deal. You should be able to do what you want. Right? It's summer.

The brain craves consistency, automaticity, and routine. ADHD brains, too. It doesn't appreciate abrupt changes. For ADHDers, changes to routine can pose significant strain to an already challenged executive function system. ADHD affects the prefrontal cortex, the front part of the brain where executive functions originate. Leaning into automaticity helps support brain operations. When you change your routines, the brain shifts from relying on automaticity to utilizing executive function skills. With ADHD, executive function skills can be weaker or less developed without scaffolding support.



Summer can make routine hard for ADHD brains for a few clear reasons:

1. Schedules shift

- School is out, work schedules may flex, vacations happen, and social invitations increase. This disrupts the predictable anchors your brain relies on to know what comes next.

2. Changes in environment

- Longer daylight hours, varying sleep-wake times, and increased outdoor activities can disrupt your body rhythms, making it harder to maintain consistent habits like bedtime, meal times, and focused work times.

3. Novelty everywhere

- Summer offers new, shiny activities that naturally call to the ADHD brain's interest-based wiring. Festivals, spontaneous outings, hobbies you've been waiting to try, and travel planning light up your dopamine pathways, making mundane but necessary routines feel even more dull by comparison.

4. Less external structure

- ADHD brains thrive on external cues like meetings, school drop-offs, and structured workdays. Summer often removes or softens these, leading to "free float" days that sound relaxing but can feel ungrounded and overwhelming without a plan.



Creating the Summer You Want

A balanced summer routine does not mean rigid schedules. It means having gentle anchors such as consistent wake-up times, a morning grounding ritual, or a set work sprint before exploring something new, that support your brain's need for structure while leaving space for the joy of summer spontaneity. This way, your ADHD brain can explore new interests while keeping your life running smoothly and in alignment with your values. The "why" matters. You will be more likely to lean into your supports when you are invested in the 'why' of it.

Why routine supports ADHD brains even when novelty is appealing:

- Routine acts as external scaffolding for executive functions, reducing the energy needed to decide what to do next.
- It helps protect important but unexciting tasks (meals, medications, sleep, planning) so you can keep your baseline needs met while enjoying summer adventures.
- Routine creates predictable dopamine through small wins, which helps sustain motivation and prevent burnout from chasing novelty alone.
- It allows you to use your interest-driven energy intentionally, reserving mental space for play and creativity without losing the essentials that support your health and responsibilities.



Rhythm ↔ *Structure*

Rhythm is a gentle flow you can move with. Structure is a steady frame that holds your day. Both help your brain know what comes next, freeing your energy for what matters most.



Hacking Your Summer Routine

Here are five ADHD brain hacks that offer rhythm and structure while honoring routine during summer:

1. Morning Anchor

- Start your day with one consistent action (a walk, stretching, journaling, or a set breakfast) before checking your phone or diving into plans. This keeps your brain grounded before summer spontaneity begins.

2. Block and Play

- Pick one block of focused time (30-90 minutes) each day for priority tasks before shifting to fun, new activities. This builds a rhythm of getting essentials done while leaving space for summer joy.

3. Visual Weekly Map

- Post a simple whiteboard or sticky note calendar showing key plans for the week. ADHD brains benefit from seeing what's coming, reducing last-minute overwhelm while still allowing for flexible changes.

4. Sunset Reset

- Use the natural rhythm of sunset as a cue to tidy your space, prep for the next day, and wind down. It becomes an external reminder to transition, helping your brain switch gears without internal battles.

5. One Non-Negotiable

- Choose one self-care or maintenance habit (such as a sleep routine, medication, or hydration) to protect daily, regardless of how busy or unstructured the day becomes. This creates a steady point of structure your brain can count on, supporting both your energy and your freedom to explore.

These hacks help you blend structure with the spaciousness of summer, letting your ADHD brain enjoy novelty while staying supported by a gentle, consistent rhythm.

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PODCAST



[033: How to create routines that you actually stick to: Morning routines for ADHD](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/033-how-to-create-routines-that-you-actually-stick-to/id1775241130?i=1000711115731)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/033-how-to-create-routines-that-you-actually-stick-to/id1775241130?i=1000711115731>



Having ADHD doesn't have to be what burns you through life. Think of your routines as your way of handing yourself a seat to sit on, so you can enjoy the ride of summer. No more burn. No more sticking on the way down. You, leaning into support systems that help set you up for success. It is precisely what your ADHD brain needs. Regardless of what this summer season brings you, be you, doing life in ways that help you be fully present and doing life your way.

There is power in your wiring. And, I believe you are worthy of living ADHD uplifted.



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