

Living Well:

Managing Executive Functioning



Below are some strategies you can try to help optimize your executive functioning, so you can complete complex tasks:

Have a ‘system’. A daily plan will increase your chances of getting things done. Write down your To-Do list for the day, and include specific times for planning and organizing each. Make it manageable – you can always add more - but be sure to prioritize what is most important.

Create step-by-step checklists. Break down a big task into many smaller, more manageable tasks. For example, if the task is to apply for a job, break it down to sub-tasks, such as:

1. *Look in computer files and locate previous resume.*
2. *Update resume with latest job/school/certificates.*
3. *Ask a friend to help with editing and formatting resume.*

Use an alarm or timer. Get in the habit of setting an alarm or timer to go off when you need to do something. You can use your phone alarm, a device such as Echo, or even a simple kitchen timer. Also use alarms to keep from sleeping in late or from napping too long.

Ask others to offer feedback and prompts. Friends or family can also be a source of support to you initially, until you find a way of managing your difficulties independently. Let them know when something is important to you, and give them permission to prompt you periodically. However, use this only as a short-term strategy, and not as a permanent solution.

Acknowledge your effort. Sometimes we move from task to task without taking time to simply acknowledge and give ourselves credit for all our hard work. Reinforcing success will help enhance our future efforts. When you complete a difficult task, take a few minutes to feel proud of yourself for the effort involved. Your brain is working harder than ever before!

Certain medical conditions can result in changes to executive functioning. These are all the skills that help you plan and organize activities, initiate them, stay on track, monitor how you are doing, keep within a timeframe, and complete things. Strategies are extremely important if you have difficulties in this area, otherwise you could be thinking of great ideas and things to do, but nothing gets completed.