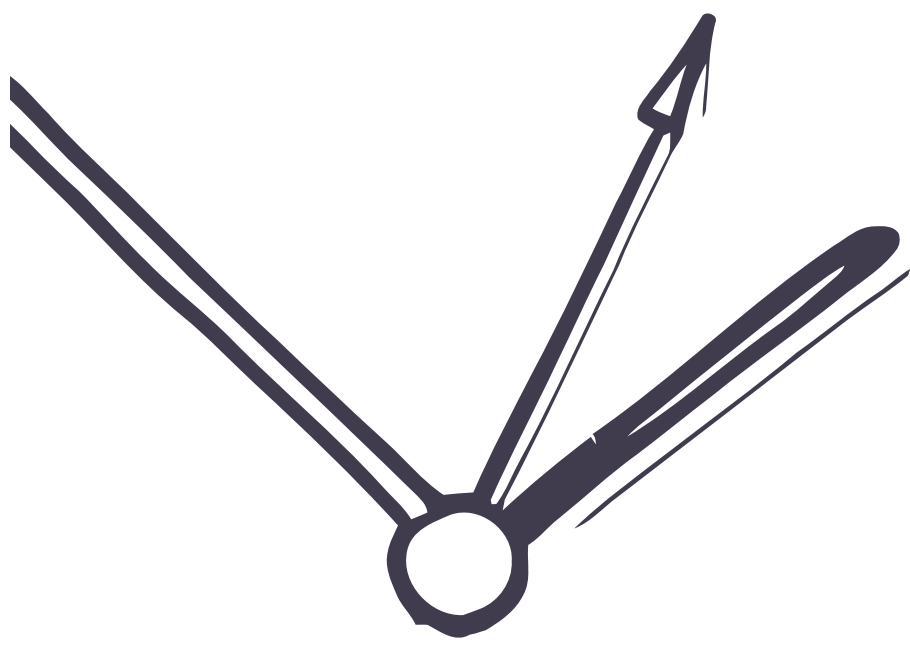
Time Blindness

Most ADHD women have a different sense of time.

This can make it hard to function in a world that senses time differently. "TIme Blindness" makes it hard to:



1. **Plan your day**
2. **Know how long things will take**
3. **Show up on time**
4. **Think about and plan for the future**



> These time challenges can also make relationships harder and increase your stress.





Causes of ADHD Time Issues

1

Brain Chemistry

Dopamine and norepinephrine imbalances can affect time awareness, making it harder to predict and feel time passing.

2

Working Memory Deficits

ADHD affects the ability to hold and use short-term information, making it harder to track how long things take or recall time-based experiences.

3

Executive Function Challenges

Difficulties with planning, prioritizing, and self-monitoring lead to struggles with estimating time, switching tasks, and tracking deadlines.

4

Internal Clock Differences- SET theory

The brain's timing system (using heart rate, light, and temperature) may be less consistent in ADHD, making time feel distorted.

5

Hyperfocus vs. Time Insensitivity

Alternating between hyperfocus (losing hours) and zoning out makes time feel like it moves too fast or too slow unpredictably.

6

Different Brains

Brain imaging studies have aso indicated that there are structural and functional differences in the brain regions of individuals with ADHD that are associated with time perception.

Dopamine-Based Treatments for Time Blindness

Did you know?

Research shows that dopamine plays a crucial role in how we perceive and process time. For people with ADHD, treatments that target dopamine levels can significantly improve time awareness.

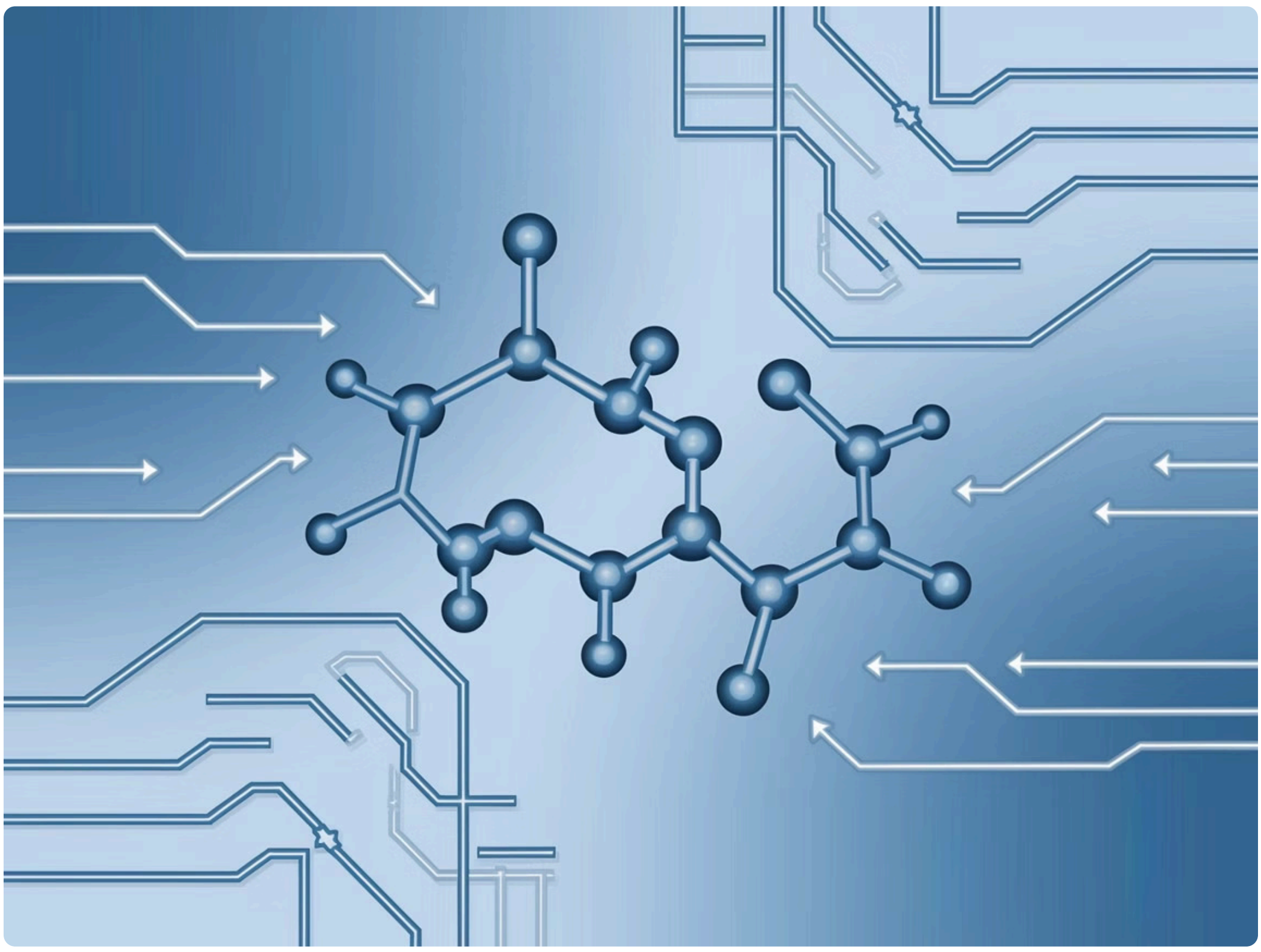
- **Medication**

  Prescription medications that adjust neurotransmitter levels help regulate the brain's timing systems

- **Stimulating Activities**

  Engaging in naturally dopamine-boosting activities can enhance time perception

The effectiveness of these dopamine-focused treatments provides strong evidence for dopamine's role in "time blindness", as they help people with ADHD experience time more similarly to their neurotypical peers.



Who Else Struggles with Time Blindness?

While time blindness is commonly associated with ADHD, it affects people with various conditions and disorders.

Autism

Difficulties with time perception and management are common in autistic individuals

Dyslexia

Research suggests connections between dyslexia and challenges with time perception

Brain Injuries

Damage to certain brain regions can disrupt time sensing abilities

Neurodegenerative Disorders

Conditions like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's can impair time tracking

Mental Health Conditions

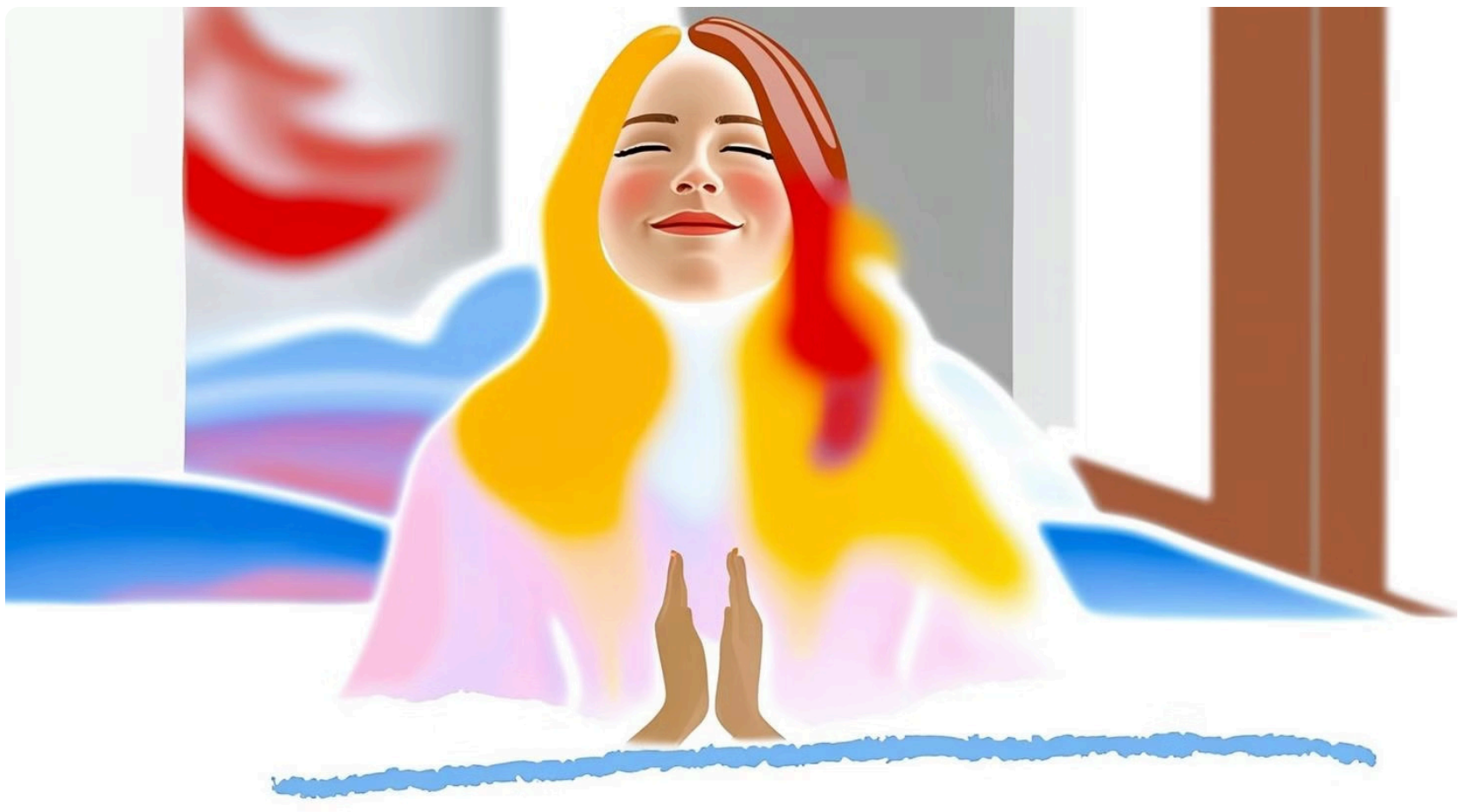
Anxiety and depression can distort perception of time's passage

Adhd people aren't the only ones that experience time differently. "Time blindness" can affect many people due to differences in brain function, processing, or mental health.

Helping Yourself With Time Blindness

Let's look at some ways to help yourself that involve different strategies and coping skills.

Embracing Self-Compassion



Navigating the world with time blindness can be challenging, especially when those around you, including neurotypical individuals, struggle to understand your experiences.

They may misinterpret your actions as **disrespectful or personal**, which couldn't be further from the truth. This misunderstanding can lead to a loss of trust, and it's heartbreaking for you.

Has time blindness caused challenges for you in your relationships?

It's crucial to remember that those who genuinely love and care for you will strive to understand and support you, just as you are.

> You **deserve of respect and understanding, not harm, shame, or criticism for your brain based differences.**

What Is Scalar Expectancy Theory (SET) and Its Connection to ADHD Time Blindness?

Scalar Expectancy Theory (SET) explains how the brain tracks time. It suggests that we have an **internal clock** influenced by factors like:

1. ⏳ Heart rate
2. 💡 Light levels
3. 🌡️ Body temperature

For ADHD people, this internal clock may run **too fast, too slow, or inconsistently**, leading to **time blindness**—the difficulty in sensing how much time has passed.

Why Are We Using SET-Based Interventions?

SET-based interventions help **regulate the brain's time-tracking system** by:

1. Using external time cues
2. Engaging in rhythmic activities
3. Adjusting environmental factors

These interventions reduce time blindness and improve time management in ADHD.

Using Nature to Manage ADHD Time Blindness

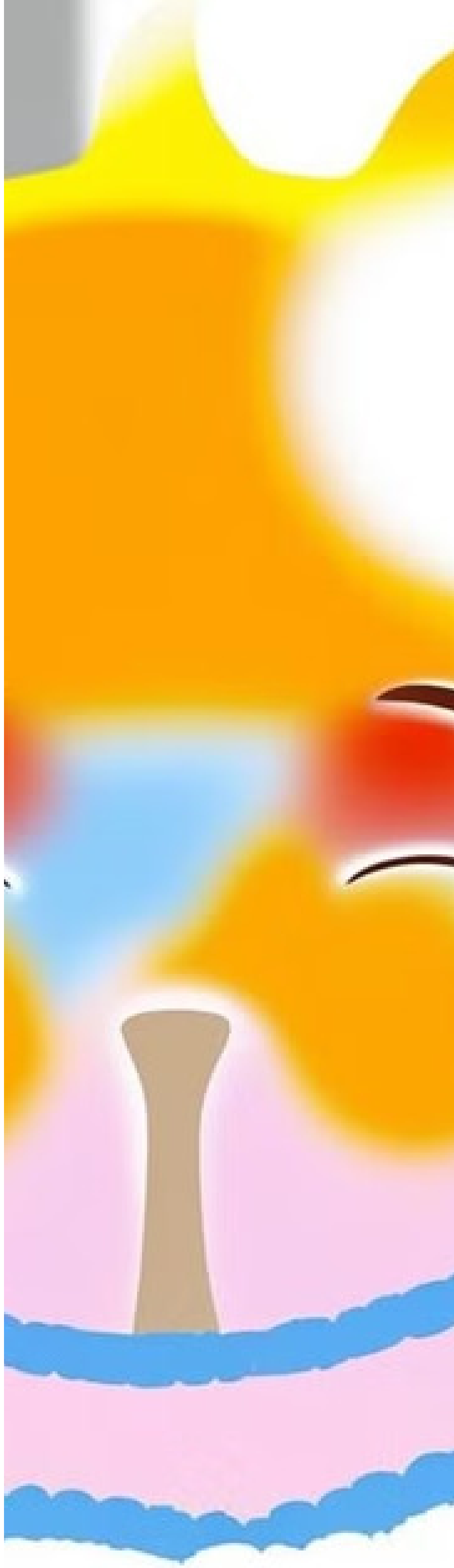
Incorporating nature into your routine can improve **time perception, focus, and well-being**.

Use Natural Time Cues ⏳

- The sun's position acts as a natural clock, helping your brain track time effortlessly.
- You can also use nature’s rhythms, like birds chirping at dawn, as time cues. For example, if birds always start singing at a certain time, glance at the clock when you hear them to reinforce your awareness of time.
- Aligning your daily activities with natural light cycles can reduce stress and improve time management.

Integrate Nature into Your Routine 🌿

- Taking **outdoor walks** or spending time in green spaces provides a calming effect and supports **mental clarity**.
- Nature exposure has been shown to **reduce ADHD symptoms** and improve focus.





Create a Nature-Inspired Environment 🌱

- Indoor plants, nature sounds, or outdoor views can enhance **emotional regulation** and **time awareness**.

A natural setting can make it easier to stay grounded and maintain a sense of time.

Practice Mindfulness in Nature 🧘‍♀️

- Activities like **deep breathing, meditation, or mindful walking in nature** can strengthen your **internal time tracking** system.

This promotes **self-regulation and better time perception**.

Align Your Routine with Natural Cycles 🌅

- Waking with the sunrise and winding down at sunset helps regulate your internal clock.
- A dawn simulator clock can reinforce this rhythm, improving sleep, focus, and time management.

Using natural time cues like sunlight supports ADHD time awareness while boosting mental and physical well-being.

Self-Advocacy Tips

Time blindness can create **challenges in relationships, work, and daily responsibilities**. Self-advocacy helps you **explain your needs and create solutions** with the people around you.

1️⃣ Communicating Time Blindness Challenges

It can be difficult to share struggles with time blindness, especially if you've faced **judgment or misunderstanding** before. However, **advocating for yourself** can improve relationships and reduce stress.

Here are a few ways to communicate your experience:

🗣️ **"I struggle with estimating how long tasks take."**
🗣️ **"I can easily lose track of time when I'm focused on something."**

> ⓘ Many people **assume time management is just a skill**—not a neurological difference. By explaining time blindness in simple terms, you **help others understand what's really happening**.

2️⃣ Identifying and Expressing Support Needs

Knowing what helps you can make self-advocacy easier. **Consider asking for:**

✔️ **Gentle reminders** – A therapist, friend, or coworker can check in about commitments.
✔️ **Understanding around delays** – If you take longer to respond to texts/emails, you might say:

- 💬 **"I care about you. Time slipped away from me—I sometimes lose track of how many days have passed."**
- 💬 ***"Would you be willing to be patient and understanding with me around this?"***

3️⃣ Choosing When & How to Disclose ADHD Time Blindness

Not everyone needs to know everything. You can adjust what you share based on the situation:

✔️ **If you feel safe,** be open about time management challenges.
You don't have to say "ADHD" or "time blindness." Instead, you could say:

- 💬 **"Sometimes, I have difficulty estimating time."**
- 💬 **"I tend to lose track of time when I'm deeply focused."**

4️⃣ Assessing Trustworthiness Before Sharing

Not everyone will understand or respect your experiences. **Before sharing:**

Consider their **past responses**—have they been understanding?
✔️ **Start small**—mention a minor time management struggle before sharing more.

Reflection: Think about a time you felt misunderstood about time blindness.
What would you want someone to know?

Self-Accommodation Tips

In my practice I try not to teach clients elaborate strategies that often wind up feeling defeated or frustrated, so I choose simple and supportive ones.

Here is a list that may or may not be helpful for you. If any of these don't work, that's okay. It doesn't mean anything is wrong with you. It just wasn't a good fit for you. Try on another one until one feels right.

External Scaffolding

Scaffolding is setting up systems outside your brain to support executive functioning

- [ ] Analog Clocks

Analog clocks show time passing in a visual way, unlike digital clocks. This can help you understand how much time you're spending on tasks in a way that helps you feel into time better.

- [ ] Set Timers

Timers can alert you when it's time to start or stop a task. This can help you stick to your schedule. I prefer visual timers that you can hold that show the visual passing of time like a clock.

- [ ] Pomodoro Timer

The Pomodoro Technique, created by Francesco Cirillo, breaks work into 25-minute intervals, or "pomodoros," followed by short breaks. It enhances productivity and focus while lessening fatigue. **https://pomofocus.io/** is a website you can use for free online, that helps you use this strategy.

- [ ] Buffer Time

Buffer time is extra time you add to your schedule to prevent time blindness. It's there for when tasks take longer than you thought. Try to add three times more time than you think you'll need for a task.

Hyperfocus Management

Hyperfocus can be both a strength and a challenge for ADHD individuals. While it allows for deep immersion in tasks, it can also lead to losing track of time and neglecting responsibilities.

1. Identify & Plan

Recognize triggers for hyperfocus episodes and try to plan for them.

Pre-schedule essential tasks and get them out of the way if possible before you hyperfocus.

2. Stay Grounded

Engage accountability partners or try body doubling—having another person working nearby to maintain time awareness.

3. Transition Gently

Use layered alarms and sensory cues. When transitioning out of hyperfocus, use progressive alarms and specific sensory cues like music or movement to ease the transition.

4. Recover & Reset

Allow downtime for recalibration. Remember that recovery time is essential—plan downtime after hyperfocus sessions to ease you back into the world

5. Optimize & Adapt

Work with hyperfocus when possible. When feasible, schedule deep work sessions to align hyperfocus with your most important tasks.

Playlist Time Management

You can create a playlist that is the exact length of time you want to spend on a task.

For example, if you want to spend an hour cleaning your house, you could create a playlist that is exactly one hour long.

When the music starts, you start cleaning. When the music stops, you stop cleaning. This can be a fun and less stressful way to keep track of time, as you're not constantly checking the clock. Plus, it can make the task more enjoyable!

Routine

A routine assists with time tracking by structuring the day. Regularly performed activities serve as time cues, anchoring our perception. This predictability enhances productivity and alleviates stress, as it sets expectations and aids time management.

I often recommend my clients incorporate just one routine into their schedule. It could be as simple as waking up at the same time daily, reading a book, making a regular call to a friend, or even enjoying a habitual cup of tea or coffee. Consistently practicing this routine can gradually instill a better sense of time.

Dopmine Hits

Why use a strategy like this to help with time blindness?

When we engage in activities that we enjoy or find rewarding, our brain releases dopamine. This not only makes us feel good, but it also enhances our focus and attention. This heightened state of attention can make us more aware of the passage of time.



For example, let's say you decide to take a quick break from work to do something you enjoy, like listening to a favorite song or playing a quick game. This activity gives you a dopamine hit, which boosts your focus. When you return to work, this heightened focus **can make it easier for you to keep track of time.**

On the other hand, when dopamine levels are low, such as when we're bored or uninterested, our **perception of time can become distorted. Tasks can seem to drag on forever, and we can easily lose track of time.**



The Dopamine Menu: Your ADHD Reward System



Specials ✨

Grand experiences like vacations and concerts - your biggest dopamine hits!

Desserts 🍰

Indulgent treats in moderation - it's okay to spoil yourself sometimes

Main Courses 🍽️

Substantial rewards requiring planning for significant mood elevation

Side Dishes 🥗

Enhancements like music or fidget toys to make tasks enjoyable

Appetizers or starters🥪

Quick, simple activities for immediate dopamine boosts

Think of managing your ADHD dopamine needs like planning a meal - from quick snacks to grand feasts. This menu gives you options for every situation, helping you maintain steady dopamine levels throughout your day.

Tips Other Coaches Teach (But I Don't)

While many coaches recommend these techniques, I prefer simpler, more supportive approaches focused on self-advocacy and self-compassion.

Task Timing & Logging

Timing regular tasks and comparing estimates to actual duration. Keeping detailed time logs of activities to better understand how long things take.

Interval Training

Setting random timers (like 7 minutes) and guessing when time is up without checking the clock. Meant to develop internal time awareness.

Day Planning & Retrospection

Writing detailed daily plans with time estimates, then comparing to actual durations. Reviewing and estimating time spent on activities at day's end.

Habit & Focus Apps

Using apps like Habitica, Streaks, Forest, or Freedom to track habits and block distractions. Visual tools like Trello or Miro for project management.

Backwards Design

Working backward from deadlines to plan project steps and timelines. Meant to prevent procrastination and last-minute rushes.

Time Blocking

Scheduling specific time slots for different tasks in your calendar - a technique that often leads to frustration for those with time blindness.

Habit Trackers Apps like Habitica or Streaks

These can help you build and maintain "productive habits", which can indirectly help manage time blindness.

Instead of these complex strategies that can lead to feelings of defeat, I focus on teaching self-compassion, self-care, and self-awareness through simpler, more supportive methods. But maybe you find these helpful and that's okay.

Dopamine Menu Worksheet: Finding Joy, Motivation, and Focus

What is a Dopamine Menu?

A dopamine menu is a personalized list of activities that help boost your motivation, focus, and joy by increasing dopamine in your brain. For ADHD women, finding ways to intentionally stimulate dopamine can help improve energy, mood, and and your sense of time.

Step 1: Identify Your Dopamine Boosters

Fill in the blanks with activities that feel good, spark joy, or bring a sense of accomplishment. Use the examples as inspiration!

Starters (Get You Going)

Quick activities that energize and help you transition into tasks.

- ___ (e.g., Dancing)
- ___ (e.g., Drinking Coffee)
- ___ (e.g., Listening to Music)
- ___ (e.g., Walking)

Mains (Good for You)

Activities that provide sustained enjoyment and engagement.

- ___ (e.g., Time with a Friend)
- ___ (e.g., Hiking)
- ___ (e.g., Baking)
- ___ (e.g., Watching Documentaries)
- ___ (e.g., Journaling)

Sides (Add to Boring Tasks)

Little boosts to make routine tasks more enjoyable.

- ___ (e.g., Listening to Music)
- ___ (e.g., Using Body Doubles)
- ___ (e.g., Listening to Podcasts)

Specials (Use Sparingly)

Indulgences that provide a dopamine hit but may need boundaries.

- ___ (e.g., Netflix)
- ___ (e.g., Social Media)
- ___ (e.g., Alcohol)

Desserts (Big Rewards)

Larger rewards for major accomplishments.

- ___ (e.g., Vacation)
- ___ (e.g., Spending Money on Something Special)

Nighttime Snacks (Relaxation Before Bed)

Activities that calm and soothe at the end of the day.

- ___ (e.g., Take a Bath)
- ___ (e.g., Read a Book)
- ___ (e.g., Burn a Candle)

Step 2: Customize Your Sensory Needs

Dopamine-boosting activities can feel different depending on how your brain and body process sensory input. Mark the ones that feel good to you!

- ▢ **Movement-based dopamine (Body & Energy)**: Dancing, stretching, exercise, running, rocking, or pacing.
- ▢ **Sound-based dopamine (Music & Audio)**: Listening to music, nature sounds, ASMR, white noise, or podcasts.
- ▢ **Touch-based dopamine (Texture & Comfort)**: Soft fabrics, weighted blankets, warm baths, fidget toys, or crafting.
- ▢ **Social-based dopamine (Connection & Fun)**: Chatting with a friend, playing games, participating in group activities, or sharing a laugh.

Step 3: Create Your Go-To Dopamine Plan

When I feel low-energy, I will:
___ (e.g., listen to an energizing song, drink a cold beverage, take a quick walk)

When I feel overwhelmed, I will:
___ (e.g., use a weighted blanket, listen to calming sounds, stim with a favorite tool)

When I need motivation to start a task, I will:
___ (e.g., set a timer for 5 minutes, play upbeat music, gamify my task)

When I finish a hard task, I will:
___ (e.g., celebrate with a small treat, watch a fun video, text a friend)

Step 4: Keep It Accessible

- Save this sheet in a place where you'll see it regularly.
- Create a visual version of your dopamine menu (sticky notes, a digital list, or a sensory-friendly chart).
- Update your dopamine menu as your needs and interests change.

By designing a dopamine-friendly routine, you can help your ADHD brain stay engaged, focused, and motivated in ways that feel natural and enjoyable. **What's on your dopamine menu today?**