

YEP, There's an **APP** FOR That



Choosing Apps for Executive Function Challenges

by Therese Willkomm, PhD, ATP,
Stacy Driscoll, MEd,
and Linda Beliveau

I F YOU HAVE ISSUES WITH EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING, you probably have issues with organization. It seems cliché to say it, but there's an app for that. As a matter of fact, there are many apps out there that keep you on task and scratching things off your "to do" list. Here, we'll discuss popular and useful apps on Apple's iOS platform.

Don't just download the first organizational app with high ratings. As someone with ADHD, you need to consider exactly which features will help you the most (and which ones might send you over the edge). How do you enter information into the app, and how is it conveyed *to* you? If it takes five steps to enter a reminder about an appointment, it's not the app for people challenged with cognitive demands. Think about the steps in having to recognize the prompt, take action, find and open the device, tap on the app, put the device away, and then execute the task. It's best to focus on apps that have few steps in the stimulus-response sequence.

It doesn't have to be typing that gets information into an app, though. There are apps that use voice, video, pictures, icons or gestures, and more for the input piece. For the output, you might decide you want to get pictures as reminders, or videos, music, alarms—the list goes on. Wearable technology is becoming more popular, too. You can also set the level of engagement with an app. A banner prompt appears across the top of a device and disappears—but an alert shows up in the middle of the screen and is harder to ignore.

Wearable technology is becoming popular, too. The Pebbles Watch receives reminders from your cell phone, as long as it's within fifty feet. When your watch vibrates, a quick glance at your wrist tells you to take action. As a bonus feature for those with executive function deficits, the watch can help you find your cell phone (ever misplaced that?). Just push the middle button and your phone plays the music you've chosen—even if it's in silent mode.



Some Facts and Figures

8,458,332: Number of people 18-64 with cognitive disabilities in the United States in 2012 (from the 2013 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium)

11%: Percentage of children 4-17 diagnosed with ADHD in 2011 (as reported by parents to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Cognitive disabilities, ADHD, and other neurological disorders can impact a person's executive function skills.

According to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health of the World Health Organization, mental functions include consciousness, orientation, intellectual functions, energy and drive functions, sleep, attention, memory, emotional functions, perceptual functions, higher level cognitive functions and language.

Annual Disability Statistics Compendium. (2013). Retrieved from <http://disabilitycompendium.org/compendium-statistics/employment>.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2013). Key Findings: Trends in the Parent-Report of Health Care Provider-Diagnosis and Medication Treatment for ADHD: United States, 2003-2011. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/features/key-findings-adhd72013.html>.

World Health Organization. (Sept. 2003) ICF Checklist. (p. 15). Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/icfchecklist.pdf?ua=>.

Reminder apps

The **Nudge-Reminders** app by Simple Tailor Software lets you map specific sounds to specific tasks. If you have difficulty with the concept of time, the Nudge app will play the same music every day to remind you it's time to eat lunch, leave the office, or walk the dog. Merely memorizing the music associated with a task reduces the cognitive load of having to first find and check a device.

Other reminder apps include **Alarmed ~ Reminders + Timers** by Yoctoville and **Any.Do Task & To-Do List** by Any.Do. With Alarmed, you can set super reminders that nag you every hour or minute until you've taken action. Any.Do lets you enter information via speech recognition and can sync with other devices. **Calendar Alarm—CalAlarm** by DEVART and **2Do: Tasks Done in Style** are apps with great customization options—from voice and picture support to colorized categorization and one-touch alarm setting.

Organizational apps

Priority Matrix by Appfluence LLC is a popular app because of its layout with four quadrants and four colors. Instead of a linear to-do list, you can sort tasks by color categorization. On an iPad 3 or newer, the built-in microphone speeds up your input. Without typing at all, you can add information to a certain quadrant and easily find the list you need to focus on at any

time. You can email lists to others, and to yourself as an added layer of reminding. Because Priority Matrix syncs with other devices, you always have access to your lists, and family members can have access as well.

The **30/30** app by Binary Hammer organizes a to-do list, includes a timer for each task and is entirely gesture-based so there's no typing at all. **KanPlan** by Houda Hamdane breaks tasks down, provides color support and can sync with a teacher or parent. Two calendar apps to consider are **Awesome Calendar** by YunaSoft, Inc. and **iSecretary** by Ernest LS. With **iSecretary**, you can view all voice reminders in calendar form; select a date and you'll see all the voice reminders for that day. **Inspiration Maps** by Inspiration Software, Inc. and **Popplet** by Notion also offer some creative ways to organize information.

Camera and photo apps

Nearly every device comes equipped with a camera app and an app to organize photos. These apps aren't just for cute photos of kids and pets. You can document and organize anything with pictures or videos. Lose receipts often? Take photos of them and put them into a designated folder. Have trouble remembering the steps to complete a certain task? Take photos or short video clips, save them in a folder, and you'll have the directions whenever you need them.

Other creative apps for picture and video cueing include **Pictello** by AssistiveWare, **Book Creator** by Red Jumper Studio, **Picture Scheduler** by Peter Jankuj, **Forgetful** by IBEX and **Choiceworks** by Bee Visual.

Of course, apps are a tool, not a treatment; so they're not all universally beneficial to everyone with ADHD. Still, with a little exploring and consideration of features, there's no doubt these apps can help reduce the cognitive demand in completing tasks and organization information. 📌

Therese Willkomm, PhD, ATP, is the director of assistive technology in New Hampshire (ATinNH), the statewide assistive technology program at the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability. An associate professor in the department of occupational therapy at UNH, she is known as the "MacGyver of Assistive Technology." Willkomm is the author of *Make a Difference Today—Assistive Technology Solutions in Minutes (ATECH Services, 2005)*. **Stacy Driscoll, MEd**, is an assistive technology specialist and founder of *LifeLong Assistive Technology*. She is an assistive technology assistant at ATinNH, and a former special education teacher. **Linda Beliveau** is the technology integrator at ATECH Services, where she partners in possibilities with NH citizens of all ages to break down barriers and construct assistive technology solutions for building a culture inclusive to all.