

ADULT ADHD IN DAILY LIFE · 8.7

# Body Doubling: Why It Works for ADHD and How to Use It

Body doubling is the practice of working alongside another person, in person or virtually, while each of you does your own thing. The other person is not helping with the task. They are simply there. For many adults with ADHD this is one of the most effective task-initiation tools available, and it is largely free.

FOR

Adults with ADHD

AUDIENCE AGE

18+

REVIEWED

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PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

## IN SUMMARY

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## What it is

- **Two or more people working at the same time on separate tasks.** Same physical space or a shared video call. A short opening (what each of you intends to do), a defined block of work (often 25 to 90 minutes), a short closing (what got done). The work itself is silent or near-silent.
- **The other person is not a coach.** They are not helping, teaching or editing. They are a body in the room, ideally focused on their own thing. The structure does the work.
- **Many formats work.** A friend or family member working at the same table. A scheduled video call. Paid coworking apps (Focusmate, Caveday and others). An online study stream. A library or coffee shop. You do not need a paid app.

## Why it works

- **It raises arousal for low-stimulation tasks.** Adult ADHD involves chronic under-stimulation of the regulatory systems that switch attention on for boring tasks. Mild social presence raises arousal in the right range without the cost of having to perform.
- **It substitutes external structure for internal time sense.** The block has a start, a length and an end. Public commitment at the opening makes the task externally visible. Switching cost is reduced because the other person also expects you to stay on this task.
- **Evidence sits in mechanism and practice, not large RCTs.** Body doubling has substantial anecdotal support and is widely recommended by ADHD organisations. The underlying mechanism is supported by the consensus literature; the specific named practice has not been the subject of large trials. The cost is essentially zero and the practice is harmless.

## How to use it

- **Match the format to the task.** In-person body doubling is best for physical tasks (admin, paperwork, household chores). Virtual body doubling works well for screen-based tasks (writing, emails, study). Match the format to what you are doing.
- **Keep the opening short and use a fixed block.** Opening: 30 seconds to two minutes. Block: 25 minutes minimum useful; 50 to 90 minutes is the sweet spot. Open-ended blocks tend to dissolve. Long openings turn into avoidance.
- **Reliability beats optimal design.** A regular weekly slot with one specific person is worth far more than a perfectly designed system you never actually start. Pick the easiest combination you will keep doing.
- **Combine with medication and basic structure.** Body doubling is one tool among several. It works best where medication (where indicated) and basic working systems are also in place. It sits on top of those; it does not replace either.

**WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL**

Speak to your GP if ADHD has not been formally assessed and task initiation is being significantly affected. Private adult ADHD assessment with a CQC-registered provider is a legitimate parallel route where the NHS wait is not workable. For structured ADHD coaching that often includes body doubling as part of the work, Access to Work is the usual funding route. Seek urgent help via 111, 999 or A&E for any acute mental health crisis or significant safety concern.

**SOURCES**

Faraone consensus 2021; Barkley 2012; Zentall and Zentall 1983 (Psychol Bull); ADHD UK

**NEXT STEPS****Speak to NeuroFX**

Private ADHD and autism assessment for adults and children aged 6 and upwards.  
CQC-registered. Bedford Consulting Rooms, 4 Goldington Road, Bedford MK40 3NF.

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