AUTONOMOUS MINDS THERAPY

The Executive Functions of Eating

Check the items you feel you've got a handle on. Leave those you'd like to break down into smaller steps and/or problem-solve creatively with your provider. If you're not sure, or there are some aspects that are difficult but inconsistently, put a question mark beside the box to designate a need for further exploration. You can also use this handout to share language with people who don't understand what's so hard about all this (must be nice!) to save you the emotional labor of explaning or defending yourself.

Across the Board

- [ ] Start the task
- [ ] Remember what you're doing and where you left off
- [ ] Sequence multiple steps
- [ ] Shift between tasks
- [ ] Estimate/manage time
- [ ] Make decisions when there are multiple options
- [ ] Recover when plans change or something goes wrong
- [ ] Manage sensory, cognitive, physical, or emotional barriers
- [ ] Maintain systems/routines that make the process easier
- [ ] Ask for help, delegate, automate, outsource, or simplify when appropriate and possible

1. Acquiring Food

<u>Notice and plan</u>

- [ ] Notice when food or ingredients need replenishing
- [ ] Check what food you have and what you need or will be needing soon
- [ ] Anticipate what meals you might like to eat this week based on trends and determine what ingredients to buy and in what quantities
- [ ] Make a grocery list
- [ ] Decide when and where to shop or place an order (you may also browse sales to help you choose)

<u>Get to the food</u>

- [ ] Find a time in your schedule to go shopping or schedule pickup/delivery
- [ ] Arrange transportation and gather what you need to shop (reusable bag, your Aldi quarter, coupons)
- [ ] Navigate the store or online ordering system (e.g. either go straight to what's on your list or go up and down each aisle; plan a route where items that might melt get picked up last)
- [ ] Find the items you need
- [ ] Choose between brands, sizes, prices, ripeness, etc.
- [ ] Find substitutions when something isn't available

- [ ] Keep track of spending and adjust purchases if needed
- [ ] Manage sensory overload, distractions, or fatigue while shopping

Bring it home and put it away

- [ ] Check that you got everything you need
- [ ] Bag items if not done for you, according to termperature or group by like items if easier for later
- [ ] Transport groceries home
- [ ] Sort food into pantry, refrigerator, and freezer
- [ ] Find storage space for bulk or oversized items if applicable
- [ ] Put perishable food away promptly
- [ ] Organize food so that it's easy to find, reach, and use

2. Preparing Food

Choose and initiate

- [ ] Narrow down options for what to eat from the food available
- [ ] Choose a meal that fits your time, energy, appetite, and sensory needs or preferences
- [ ] Gather the food, equipment, and instructions you need and put it all in your preparation area

Prepare and sequence

- [ ] Follow a recipe or other instructions, rechecking preheating temperatures, measurements, or microwave times if working memory is a challenge
- [ ] Complete preparation steps in the correct order, and decide whether multi-tasking to manage steps and components is safe and reasonable for effiiency (e.g. chop vegetables while water boils)
- [ ] Measure, chop, open, mix, stir, etc.
- [ ] Set timers
- [ ] Check food as it cooks, adjust as needed
- [ ] Resume preparation after interruptions

Manage the environment

- [ ] Manage sensory input from smells, textures, heat, sounds, mess, etc.
- [ ] Adapt the preparation process when something is difficult or aversive
- [ ] Use shortcuts that make preparation more manageable

Prepare the setting for eating

- [ ] Plate/assemble the food
- [ ] Add preferred toppings, condiments, or sides
- [ ] Let food cool or otherwise make it comfortable to eat
- [ ] Get utensils, drinks, and anything else needed
- [ ] Bring the food to the place where you'll eat

3. Eating Food

Start eating

- [ ] Notice it's time to eat or respond to either an internal cue or a reminder
- [ ] Stop or pause what you're doing
- [ ] Transition to eating
- [ ] Get food and eating supplies together
- [ ] Begin eating

Stay engaged

- [ ] Stay focused on eating rather than getting absorbed in another activity
- [ ] Resume eating after interruptions or distractions
- [ ] Manage competing activities, conversations, or demands while eating

Make adjustments

- [ ] Modify the food when it's not working (sensory overwhelm or inadequacy, appetite change, insufficient amount, etc.): heat it up, add salt, etc.
- [ ] Get additional food or a different food when needed
- [ ] Save remaining food, if any, (either what remains in original container or on your plate) when you're finished
- [ ] Recognize when the meal is complete and transition to the next activity

4. Cleaning Up

Sort and put food away

- [ ] Sort leftovers, trash, recycling, and dishes
- [ ] Package and store leftovers
- [ ] Put ingredients and food away
- [ ] Remember/use leftovers before they go bad

Wash and clean

- [ ] Gather and wash dishes, utensils, and cookware
- [ ] Load/run/unload the dishwasher, if applicable
- [ ] Clean food-preparation surfaces and spills
- [ ] Take out trash when needed
- [ ] Put dishes and equipment away
- [ ] Stay at a reasonable "good enough" point rather than getting stuck in either avoidance or over-cleaning

Additional Load for Eaters Managing Chronic Illnesses

- [ ] Remember medications, determine timing relative to meals (e.g. dose and take insulin 15 minutes before eating, calculate correct amount of nutrition for medications with a minimum, ensure no nutrient-drug interactions)
- [ ] Adjust meal content and timing as needed for medication side effects and symptoms
- [ ] Identify foods likely to cause symptoms

- [ ] Plan around bathroom access
- [ ] Manage eating when symptoms affect appetite or tolerance
- [ ] Read ingredient/allergen labels, verify ingredients when eating prepared food
- [ ] Communicate dietary restrictions if being served
- [ ] Plan food texture, portions, and timing with treatment recommendations
- [ ] Use adaptive equipment for cooking and maintain easy-access backup foods
- [ ] Adjust meal plans based on available energy
- [ ] Keep biometric markers that indicate need for specific nutrition intervention in mind while monitoring (e.g. blood sugar levels)