A fact sheet about

Body doubling to get started

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Body doubling to get started

What body doubling is, why company may help you start, and how to try it.



Key points

- Many neurodivergent adults find it easier to start a task when someone else is there. This is called body doubling (definition below).
- The other person does not need to help, check on you or even talk. They can be doing their own thing.
- They can be in the same room, on a video call, or in a recorded "study with me" video.
- One small step is to ask one person to keep you company for one task this week.

What body doubling is

The washing has been in the basket for three days. You know what to do and you want it done, but each time you look at it, nothing happens. Then a friend drops by, sits at the table with a cup of tea, and the washing gets folded while you catch up. Or it gets folded while they scroll their phone and you each keep to yourselves.

Telling yourself to try harder did not get you moving, but having someone there did. You can read more about why starting is its own job here.

Body doubling means doing a task while another person is with you. The name came from the community, not from research, and many people use it for years before they hear the word for it.

A survey asked neurodivergent people how they use body doubling. They said it means using someone else's company to start a task, stay on it or finish it. They used it for all kinds of things: study, work, dishes, cleaning and exercise.

The other person can be:

- someone in the same room, doing their own task
- a friend on a video call, with cameras on and sound off
- a stranger in a café or library
- a recorded video of someone working, often called "study with me"
- a group online where people work quietly side by side

Sometimes both of you are working, so you help each other. Sometimes only one of you has a task, and the other is just there.

Why someone nearby may help you start

People in the survey said a body double helped them build up speed at the start and then stay on the task.

Not everyone feels this way. For some people, being watched makes a task harder, or a person nearby is too distracting. That may be truer if being asked or expected to do a thing makes it harder for you to start. So the best body double may be one who does not comment or check on you. Or it may be a video, where nobody can see you at all.

This advice comes from what neurodivergent adults say helped them. It has not been tested in research yet, so it is anchored in lived experience and in what the community shares about it. More broadly, research on autism, ADHD and neurodivergence has often left out BBIA (Black, Brown, Indigenous and Asian) people, LGBTQIA+ people and other groups. Your lived experience is what is most valid.

The one thing to try: one body double for one task

Pick one task you keep putting off. It does not need to be work: it might be a form, a pile of washing, a phone call or a project you love. Then pick one way to have company for it:

- ask someone you live with to sit nearby while you do it
- set up a video call with a friend, where you both work on your own thing
- put on a "study with me" or "clean with me" video
- take the task to a café or a library

Set a time, like 25 minutes, so it has a clear end. You only need to start while they are there, and if you keep going after they leave, that is a bonus. If the start is still hard, make the first step one small physical action, like putting the form on the table.

You might share what you plan to do with the other person at the start, or you might prefer not to. It may take a few tries to find the kind of company that suits you.

You can set a reminder in the Understanding Zoe app for the time you agreed. You can also keep a note there of the tasks that went better with company, so you know where to use it next.

Asking someone can feel like a lot. A short message may be enough: "Can you keep me company while I do my tax for half an hour? You don't need to do anything." You can also read more about calm company you share with another adult here.

Getting support

This page describes what many adults say about themselves. It is not an assessment, and it cannot tell you what is going on for you.

You can ask for support at any point, whether this happens every day or only now and then. A GP is a good place to start. A GP can talk with you about a Mental Health Treatment Plan, which can lower the cost of sessions. Different health professionals can help with getting started and with planning your week, and your GP can help you work out who is right for you. You can also book a telehealth session through Understanding Zoe.

If it has been hard to start almost anything for weeks, and you feel worn out, it may be closer to burnout. You can read more about autistic burnout here.

Sources

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UnderstandingZoe

Understanding Zoe is the first neuroaffirming AI-powered app that turns every report, observation and moment into an actionable next step, supporting neurodivergent people and those who care about them to thrive.

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