

Living Well:

Managing Attention and Concentration



1. Attend to cognitive fatigue issues first.

You will be able to concentrate much better if you are not feeling fatigued. Try a 'brain break' of closing your eyes and shutting off sounds for a few minutes.

2. Notice instances when concentration is most difficult and/or especially focused.

If you are aware of the circumstances around when your concentration is either strong or vulnerable, you can use this information to build a strategy to fill the gap. For example, if you notice that you are most focused while cooking when you make one dish at a time without any interruption, you can apply this wisdom to other challenging activities (i.e. reducing distractions when writing emails). Consider getting input from loved ones to find creative solutions.

3. Do one thing at a time and switch between tasks more slowly.

Many people find that they are more effective at doing one thing at a time rather than multitasking. Also, consider building in more time when going from task to task.

4. Manage distraction. Noise or visual distractions can cause you to go from one thing to another without first completing what you were doing. Reduce noise and visual distraction by: turning off TV/radio, pulling blinds/curtains/repositioning your desk at work, etc.

Sometimes stress/anxiety/worry are distracting. You can lessen the impact by using **STOP-FOCUS-RETURN**: Noticing early on (STOP), focusing on your breath (FOCUS) to clear your mind, and return back to what you intended to do (RETURN). Also, consider stress buster strategies such as journaling, talking to someone for support and/or problem-solving, and simply setting aside a specific time to think about what is on your mind.

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With certain medical and psychological conditions, many people find they have more difficulty focusing or concentrating on the task at hand. While for some distractibility can get better on its' own, for others managing distractibility may be the 'new normal' going forward. Consider trying these strategies to help lessen the impact of distractibility.

Talk through steps aloud as you do them.

Talking aloud through the steps of a task while you do them helps to keep you on track by enhancing your focus (i.e. "I'm going upstairs to find my glasses, I'm looking for my glasses" etc.). Write a list and do one thing at a time, then tick it off to show it has been completed.

Use a 'focusing' phrase.

If you feel you are losing concentration have a phrase (i.e. "stay on track") to return your attention to the task at hand.

