

A close-up photograph of two hands, one from the left and one from the right, holding a square frame. The hands are silhouetted against a bright, warm sunset or sunrise sky. The sun is positioned in the center of the square frame, creating a strong lens flare and illuminating the scene. The overall mood is hopeful and focused.

8 *ways to*

**Find Your
Focus**

Many people struggle to focus – whether it’s on work, household tasks, or other activities. If you have trouble maintaining your attention on a single task or concentrating throughout the day, don’t worry, you are not alone. Getting distracted is very common, especially with all the interruptions, technology, buzzing notifications, and more we all face on a daily basis.

Science can actually explain why we have trouble focusing – in simple terms, it’s because attention is a limited resource. Much like anything else, there’s only so much we have to give. Experts say maintaining our attention uses glucose and other metabolic resources that can run low.

According to psychologists, there are four types of attention. Understanding the differences between the types of attention can help you determine if and when you need to turn off other stimuli to be successful.

Sustained attention is what most of us know as undivided attention. While it’s the most effective form of attention, it’s also the most difficult to achieve and even harder to maintain. Sustained attention is ideal for learning activities such as listening to a teacher, reading books, or doing an extensive project.

Selective attention is when you have to filter out other stimuli in order to focus – the brain has to actually choose from various options to make a selection. An example of selective attention is trying to



listen to a friend while at a loud party. Your brain is fairly used to this type of attention and typically picks up on the most important stimuli.

Alternating attention, as its name suggests, is the ability to “toggle” back and forth between various activities or functions. The brain quickly adapts to the pattern and allows your attention to shift successfully between activities.

Divided attention is basically multi-tasking, which can be one of the least effective types of attention. According to the American Psychological Association, “Doing more than one task at a time, especially more than one complex task, takes a toll on productivity.” If the things you’re working on aren’t

mission critical – i.e. talking on the phone with a friend while doodling – divided attention is ok. It’s when you’re working on important projects that require greater focus that undivided attention becomes a problem.

Tips for Improving Your Focus

With today’s busy schedules and constant distractions, research says we’re becoming less productive due to our inability to pay attention to the tasks we need to get done. Experts suggest that trying to focus on multiple activities at once can inhibit productivity by as much as 40%. Yet, in today’s day and age, we try and try again – with much frustration and little success. Here are our tips on how to find your focus, regardless of what you are trying to achieve.

1 Avoid Distractions. While it's harder to do than ever, if you want to be successful you have to make a concerted effort to eliminate things that disrupt your focus. Distractions are everywhere and they can vary from person to person. Obvious distractions include mobile phone notifications (ding! ding!), background TV noise, people's voices, and loud noises. One thing we often forget, however, is that our thoughts can also serve as a source of distraction. Maybe you're stressing about another project or a personal problem... or you could be excited about a major life event such as a vacation, new home, or new job. Either way, your attention can easily shift from the task you're trying to focus on to whatever may be on your mind. Your best bet is to silence your phone, turn off all background noises (when possible), and set your intention



to what you need to accomplish before you get started – doing your best to push out other thoughts. If you need to, keep a notebook to jot down thoughts and ideas that are off-topic that may pop into your head so you can get back to the task at hand.

2 Exercise Your Body. Exercise can help get your blood flowing, which can really enhance your brain function in the short term. In the long term, it can help prevent dementia. Research suggests that your focus is improved for two to three hours after a good workout. Many people like to start their day with exercise, while others prefer a mid-day workout to improve their focus in the afternoon when it can be challenging to cross the finish line from a long day at work. Either way, exercise is a great way to improve your ability to pay attention while keeping the rest of your body healthy, too!



3 Exercise Your Mind. Practice makes perfect, so exercise your brain every day – it's a muscle that needs to be moved! Simple brain games can help your mind maintain its ability to focus,

particularly as you age. If you prefer good old-fashioned pen and paper, try the newspaper's daily crossword puzzle or a sudoku puzzle. If you're tech-savvy, there are hundreds of brain games apps available for your computer, tablet, or mobile phone. Other ideas to help you exercise your focusing muscle include gradual "workouts." For example, if you are struggling to focus, set small goals. Set a timer and try to focus for 5-10 minutes at a time, increasing the number of minutes each time. After several weeks of this, you should see some improvement in your ability to concentrate.

4 Get Enough Sleep. Sleep is a serious prerequisite for good focus, as it represents the time our bodies take to heal and restore. Sleep is critical to the function of all body systems, including our nervous system,

which includes our brain. If you aren't getting enough sleep, chances are you won't be able to focus effectively, and you may even be prone to confusion. Experts recommend adults get seven to nine hours of sleep per night, and even getting one less hour of sleep can significantly impact your ability to concentrate. If you want to be able to focus, make decisions, *and* think logically – getting enough ZZZZs should be at the top of your to-do list each and every day.

5 Feed Your Focus. What you eat and drink can also have an impact on how well you can focus throughout the day. That's because certain foods can actually impact how well your brain performs. From antioxidant-rich foods to foods featuring Omega-3 fatty acids, some top recommendations include blueberries, green tea,

dark chocolate, fatty fish, water, leafy green veggies, and flaxseeds – all of which have properties that can help improve your concentration.

6 Boost Your Concentration with Essential Oils. There are a number of essential oils that have been linked to improving your ability to concentrate. For most, it will require some homework and a little trial and error to find what works best for you, but it's well worth it. Some of the top essential oils for focus and concentration include lavender, frankincense, vetiver, peppermint, and lemon. Stop by your local natural foods store to ask questions and learn more about how to use this powerful, natural method for improving your concentration.

7 Practice Meditation and Mindfulness. To keep your mind from wandering and maintain your ability to focus, research suggests practicing meditation. According to a 2012 article published in the *Journal of Neuroscience*, people who regularly practice meditation can improve their ability to focus. How does it work? Meditation can actually alter your brain activity. In studies, those who meditate on a routine basis demonstrated a better ability to control the brain activity that's constantly running in the background so they can focus. Meditation is called a practice because it





takes time to master the skill. To get started, try checking out a few of the thousands of books, podcasts, and apps that are devoted to this 5,000-year old practice. If you can't get the hang of meditation, you can also try mindfulness, which *Psychology Today* defines as a state of open attention on the present. Being mindful can help you focus on the task at hand, which is critical to concentration.

8 Try Listening to Music. While individual preferences vary on this one, the science is definitely there to support the use of music in enhancing concentration. Numerous studies conducted by music therapy experts demonstrate the impact music can have in the workplace – with some studies finding that those who listen to music while working are able to complete tasks more quickly. Experts recommend music without words for optimal performance. Music can also boost your

mood, which may also help your ability to get the job done. While we all have trouble concentrating from time to time, try a few of these strategies the next time you really need to focus. Chances are – with a little extra effort and the introduction of some healthy habits such as exercise and sleep – you will be well on your way to optimal concentration, productivity, and effectiveness.



Sources

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