**Gaining Focus**



Gaining more focus starts with eliminating distractions. Once you're working in an optimal environment, you can take stets to improve your focus and concentration.

Reduce Distractions

Ever feel like you've worked all day and gotten very little accomplished? That's because, on average, it takes 25 minutes to get back on task once you've been distracted. If you are interrupted just 4 times a day, you could be losing half (or more) of your work hours trying to refocus.

Here are a few ideas for reducing distractions for better focus.

* Remove or hide unnecessary technology. Put your personal cell phone in a drawer with the sound turned down. Only check it when you are taking a break.
* Remove shortcuts from your computer screen to things that are not relevant to what you are doing. Social media sites, instant messaging, YouTube, email and so forth can quickly eat up a ton of time in your day. As with the cell phone, schedule specific times when you will check email, visit social media sites and so forth.
* Stop multitasking. We once thought people were more productive if they multitasked, but recent studies show that is not the case. You actually get more accomplished and do a better job when you focus on one task at a time.
* Schedule time to make phone calls and turn off the ringer for the rest of the day. Explain to friends, family and clients that you only take calls during certain hours so you can focus on work.
* Declutter your environment. The more streamlined and organized your work area is, the more focused and productive you will be.
* While you want to reduce clutter, it's okay to decorate with a few items such as a plant and a few pictures.
* Reward yourself when you've worked hard and stayed focused. A 15 minute break doing something you love or calling a friend to chat will encourage you to focus again once you return to what you are doing.
* Keep the temperature at a comfortable setting. Being too hot or too cold can cause you lose focus.
* If noise is an issue, purchase a pair of noise cancelling headphones or play some "white noise" to drown out background sounds.
* If you're being visually distracted by things outside a door or window, move your desk where you're not staring directly outside. Alternately, hang a sheer curtain so your vision is filtered but the light still shines through.

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* Prioritize your to do list. This ensures you get the most important tasks finished first.
* Stay hydrated and take a brisk walk during your lunch break to reenergize your mind and body.
* When you're not performing as well as you'd like, chew a piece of gum or eat a mint. The smell and taste of peppermint has been found to improve concentration.
* Work on the most important things when your focus is at peak performance. Some people find working early mornings is best, some find their attention is best during the late morning or early afternoon.
* Work from a planner or to do list, setting specific times when you will do each thing. If necessary, set alarms to remind you it's time to stop what you're doing and move on to the next thing. This will keep you focused on what you are working on without having to subconsciously worry about missing another important task.
* Keep some rosemary oil nearby as an air freshener. Scientific studies show that just a whiff can improve your concentration.
* Practice deep breathing. Your mind cannot function well without plenty of oxygen.
* Work in 30-minute increments. Set a timer for 30 minutes and focus on the task at hand. If your mind starts to wander, bring it back into focus and keep working until the timer goes off. Take a 5 minute-recharge break to breath deep, get a drink of water and stretch. Then reset the timer for another 30-minute sprint.
* On days where you simply cannot seem to focus, if possible, take a 20-minute power nap. Hydrate yourself well and try again. If that doesn't help, consider, if possible, taking the rest of the day off and refocusing the next day.
* Do something fun on your lunch break. It will put you in a better mood and help you feel more focused.
* Practice living in the now. The more mindful you are of your surroundings and your body, the better your ability to function at optimal level.
* Schedule time to deal with things that cause stress. Worrying all day will keep you distracted. But if you know you have time set aside later to deal with those stressors, you will be able to focus better.
* Eat foods that boost your concentration such as avocados, walnuts and even chocolate.
* If you have a full day of tasks, switch between those that require a lot of attention such as paying bills with things that do not, like drafting your grocery list.
* Work word puzzles in your spare time. Studies show they help improve the brains ability to reason, remember and focus.