

[IMAGE]

5 Is for FOCUS

By Editorial Staff

With so many stimuli hitting us from different directions these days (often all at once), it's hard to stay focused. Whether it's struggling to concentrate on work during the day while being beset with questions from staff or trying to tune out the TV, the barking dog and screaming kids long enough to balance your checkbook at night, here are five tips that can help improve your ability to focus.

1. *Manage Your Stress.* When you experience stress, your brain releases stress hormones, which can accumulate over time and affect your brain's ability to focus. Chronic stress can also lead to anxiety or even depression, which will interfere with memory and concentration. Anger, which is more likely during times of stress, can cause even more stress hormones to be released, compounding the problem.
2. *Get Enough Sleep.* Lack of sleep, particularly long-term, has numerous negative consequences, not the least of which is reduced ability to focus. Anyone who's been sleep deprived understands how true this is. In an interview with CNN, Dr. Kathleen Nadeau explains that fatigue influences the production of brain chemicals, which can lead to symptoms such as forgetfulness and lack of concentration.
3. *Woman focusing her attention.* - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark *Stay Active.* Studies suggest people who exercise have better concentration and focus than people who forgo exercise. Who hasn't felt more focused and alert after taking a brisk walk? Stay active and you'll avoid the "stuck at your desk all day" syndrome that can keep you staring at the computer monitor, struggling to focus.
4. *Eat Healthy.* Fruits and vegetables contain antioxidants, which provide vital nourishment to brain cells. Along with other heart-healthy foods, they also discourage the formation of cholesterol, which can eventually clog arteries and impede blood flow to the brain. Also remember to eat multiple small meals and snacks throughout the day; hunger affects blood sugar levels, which can inhibit your ability to focus.
5. *Train Your Mind.* A busy mind is a healthy mind, better able to concentrate and focus. To keep your mind busy (not overwhelmed, mind you, but sharp), learn a new skill, do crossword puzzles or play board games that make you think, read consistently, or do any number of other mind-stimulating pursuits. This will also help build mental endurance, allowing you to maintain focus even when faced with multiple tasks.

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