



Knowledge

## Training Yourself to Pay Attention

Attention is the brain's ability to take notice of things in your internal environment (pain) or external environment (someone entering the room). Attention is a critical and foundational skill needed to carry out your activities of daily living. Attention serves as the stepping stone for complex mental functions such as memory and learning.



Strategies

Below we have outlined some key **strategies** commonly utilized to improve attention skills:

### Keep it simple

1. Pre-plan and focus on one task (or a portion of the task) at a time
2. Avoid multi-tasking as you expend more energy as you move from one task to the other and back; conserving energy by staying dedicated to one task prevents cognitive fatigue

### Limit external interruptions when trying to focus on the task-at-hand

1. Turn off or silent your phone; use ear plugs
2. Isolate yourself to a known quiet place
3. Close the door and perhaps post 'do not disturb' signage outside your door
4. Communicate with staff at the shelter regarding your attention difficulties and your strategies to minimize distractions

### Monitor internal distractions

1. Pain or fear of failure can occupy your thoughts and distract you from the task at hand
2. Write the thoughts down on a piece of paper to allow for a 'transfer' of these thoughts away from the brain and onto the paper

### Managing both internal and external distractions

You will get distracted; that is ok; the key is to learn how to 'self-manage' distractions

*Resource shared courtesy of Reema Shafi, PhD, OT. Reg. (Ont.)*

1. Recognize your distractions and create a list of things that have distracted you
2. Problem solve - how you can avoid them for your next session
3. Take appropriate action to avoid the distraction
4. Reflect and re-strategize for a more successful and efficient solution

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**Train yourself to focus:** Actively monitor yourself within the context of your immediate physical environment; then make an effort to focus on an object in your environment and train yourself to maintain attention on the object for the next 1-2 minutes; it is quite common for your attention/gaze to shift to something else in the room or to internal cues and thoughts; that is ok; re-direct your gaze back to the intended item; actively think about the object (its shape, size, placement, purpose, etc.) to help sustain attention.



Exercise

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Remember: With practice, you can 'exercise' and 'train' your attention skills to improve



Tip!