

Attention Strategies

Helping you focus

This handout explains the 4 types of attention. It also gives strategies to help you focus when your attention is impaired.

What is attention?

Attention is your ability to focus on an idea or activity and to manage interruptions while you are doing this. Attention is a complex activity. It helps you interact with others, complete daily tasks, and learn and recall new information.

Attention may be impaired to varying degrees. And, there are different types of attention that can be affected.

Types of Attention

- **Sustained attention:** the ability to focus on one thing for a long time, such as watching a movie or reading a book.
- **Selective attention:** the ability to focus on one thing when there are other distractions. An example is reading while someone else is talking on the phone.
- **Shifting attention:** the ability to shift your attention from one task to another and return your attention to a task after an interruption. An example is when the phone rings while you are paying bills – you answer it and then return to your bills.
- **Divided attention:** the ability to focus on more than one activity at the same time. An example is driving a car while talking with a passenger.

How to Help Improve Your Attention

- Decrease distractions around you:
 - Turn off the TV and radio.
 - Close the door if there is sound or movement in another room.



One way to help improve your attention is to turn off the TV and radio.

- Turn off the phone ringer.
- Go to a quieter area or ask others to leave the room when you are trying to focus.
- Adjust lighting to fit your needs.
- Do one project at a time:
 - Clear away clutter.
 - Maintain a clear workspace that is just for you.
- Include routines in your daily schedule, such as a morning routine of waking up, eating breakfast, and taking your medicines.
- Take breaks:
 - Schedule regular breaks.
 - Stop and rest when you start making mistakes or feel frustrated.
 - Breaks can include naps, exercise, listening to music, or closing your eyes and resting.
- Schedule hard tasks at your “best” time of day, when your mind is sharpest.
- Tell yourself to mentally “focus.”
- At first, work for shorter periods. Then lengthen your work time as your endurance improves.
- Be aware of the effects of fatigue and pain. When you are tired or in pain, this could affect your ability to focus.
- Be aware of the effects of your medicines. Some medicines can affect your ability to focus.
- Keep good eye contact when you are listening to others.
- In a group, ask people who are talking to speak one at a time.

Questions?

Your questions are important. If you have questions or concerns, please call your Speech and Language Pathologist:
