

Attention and Focus Issues 'Tips and Tricks'

1. Have something to keep your hands busy like a small flat stone or a tennis, racquet or stress ball. There are many specific [devices](#) for this now. I have [linked](#) to a couple but am not being paid to endorse anything. Just offering something to look at to get ideas. The key is to not get something that is so distracting it becomes the problem instead of the solution.
2. Use a piece of paper or a bookmark to track where you are reading, line by line, down the page as it is being read or studied. This will allow you to know where you were if you get distracted and return to the page. For some it limits what the eyes can see so it is easier to follow the sentences and not visually get lost in the whole paragraph.
3. Some people have so many thoughts going on in their head that having something to focus on helps. With this in mind, some people benefit by have White Noise or music playing. Yes, White Noise is a thing, look it up. After being evaluated there may be an accommodation for this type of device. Some workplaces and classrooms will allow headphones or radios, many do not. Also, be aware of safety issues concerning being able to hear what is going on around you in workplace settings. However, this may help when you are tasked with reading a manual or textbook. This may also help with tests, but again, only if headphones or White Noise machines are allowed.
4. Change your diet. Less sugars are better for many reasons! This can be very important for many people who feel hyped up or cannot stay awake right after breakfast or lunch. According to a diet/nutrition nurse I worked with, the sugars and carbs burn off quickly and then your energy level can go way down. So, hyped up at first followed by cannot stay awake. So, skip the breads and stick with the proteins and vegetables.
5. How is your sleep? Some adolescents (and adults) sleep for much less time than our bodies need. Sleep is important. According to the [CDC](#), young persons from age 13 to 18 should get 8–10 hours of sleep per 24 hours. They do not state that being in bed with a phone or tablet counts as sleeping... because it does not. Go to sleep will ya? You will think and feel better the next day!
- 5a. If you do use your tablet or phone at night, put it on the night setting which should reduce the blue light from the screen and assist with letting your mind and eyes relax. Night Mode is still not as good as turning them off and just going to bed, but better than nothing. Try it and see!
6. Some people just drift off when doing something boring... like sometimes reading a textbook. But you still do have to read it to get the information in your head. If it is possible without disturbing others or breaking work/classroom rules, set a phone alarm to go off every 15 minutes. Vibrate will work with most phones and not disturb others. This will limit the time lost and redirect the attention to the task or studies needed to be accomplished instead of losing your focus for 30, 40 minutes, or more.

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7. Where you sit in a room can affect your ability to stay focused. If you are easily distracted, then sitting in the middle of your friends, or a loud group of people is not a good idea. Try to sit away from friends (you can see them at lunch), maybe even move to the front of the class or seminar so the 'action' is behind you. What you cannot see will not steal your attention. If you fall asleep easily, sit by the teacher or presenter and remember to ask the teacher for help in keeping on task. Asking for help may keep you out of trouble since you initiated the support of the teacher instead of looking like you just don't care. If you can keep yourself on task, then being in the back may allow for you to read small sections at a time with brief 'stand up and stretch' breaks every 10 to 15 minutes, but in a way that is not distracting to others. Again, let the teacher/presenter know what and why you are standing and stretching.

8. Are you feeling stressed about things other than class or the task at hand. Sometimes there is just 'something' else on our minds (i.e., relationship issues, a death in the family, parents not getting along, etc.). Let a trusted adult (yes, this includes your parents if you're an adolescent) or friend know what's up. It really does help to talk things out and not keep whatever is going on all bottled up and boiling over into other things you are trying to do.

9. And, TRUTH! Sometimes studying for school or reading an instruction manual is just simply boring, HOWEVER it is important to learn and know the information. This type of reading takes effort to stay on task and get the information in your head. (Spoiler Alert: You may have to read the information several times for it to stick in your brain... no really). Perhaps you have just never learned to settle down and focus. All or some of these may be true for you. If you are a student, conversation with your parent or instructor can help them understand and assist you, or realign your expectations about learning. Taking good notes and review requires effort.

10. I have had students recommend this, but I think it would hurt. However, I offer it with the advice to not 'really' hurt yourself. Some say having a rubber band on their wrist and then **lightly** snapping it can help with staying awake. This makes sense as it can be startling and trigger biological responses that make one alert, but again, not so that it is really painful please. And, only after you've tried everything else. And still, I only reluctantly offer this tip because many students said it helped them.

11. If all of this does not help, and you are having an unpleasant time with life or school because of not being able to focus, please seek out some assistance. Be sure to let your parent, school counselor or doctor know what of these 10 items did, or did not, help. Most of all, don't just suffer, try these things first and if they don't help, or maybe just not enough, let someone know what's going on with you. You deserve the help. Honestly, it takes a stronger person to ask for help than to just suffer. Be a strong advocate for yourself, don't suffer and speak up today!