# How to improve your focus at work

Table of Contents

Why do we struggle to focus?

Focus can be defined by our ability to pay attention to a particular task or activity. Some people find it relatively easy to focus when completing concentrated tasks, however others may struggle.

There are many factors that can affect our ability to focus.

- Physical factors may be related to how well we are taking care of our bodies and giving it what it needs to function well.
- Mental factors are more to do with what is going on in our minds.

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How to support your body for better focus

| Good quality sleep |
| Nutritious meals |
| Hydration |
| Exercise |
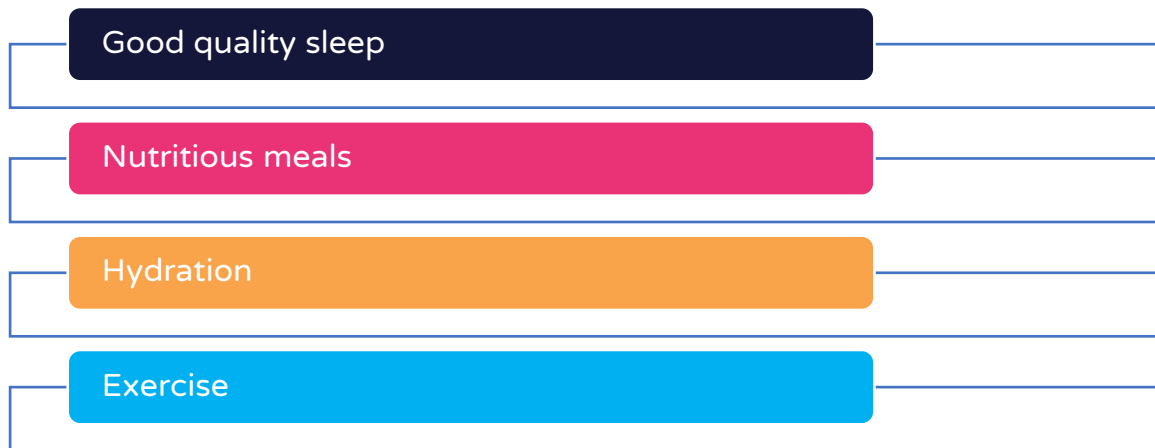
Good quality sleep

Make sure that you are getting enough sleep at night. For adults this is around 7-9 hours of sleep.

- Only sleep in your bed – don't work, scroll on your phone, or eat in bed.
- Reduce screen time before bed.
- Go to sleep around the same time each night.
- Don't consume caffeine or alcohol before bed.

Nutritious meals

Eat foods that provide you with the nutrition that you need. A healthy balanced diet will make it easier for you to concentrate and keep you physically healthy.

- Consume fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.
- Have regular snacks and meals – try not to skip meals when you're busy.

Hydration

Aim to drink around 8 glasses of water per day.

- If you struggle to remember to drink water regularly, set a reminder on your phone to remember to drink at regular intervals.
- Alternatively, keep a bottle of water on your desk to serve as a visual prompt to keep yourself hydrated.

Exercise

Regular exercise can help to boost your energy and mood, which can improve your focus overall.

- Pick physical activities that you enjoy so exercise doesn't feel like a chore.
- Try to incorporate some movement into your working day, for example by going for a walk on your lunch break.

How to support your mind for better focus

Prioritisation

Eliminate distractions

Approach tasks positively

Prioritisation

Identify what your priorities are, so you know what requires your attention first.

Try not to multitask – task switching can reduce your ability to pay attention to a single activity, and reduces overall productivity.

Eliminate distractions

Remove anything that could be a potential distraction when you're working.
- Keep only items that you need for work on your desk, e.g., pen and paper, computer, water bottle.
- Close apps/tabs that you don't need to use when working.
- Put your phone on silent/do not disturb so you're not distracted by any notifications.
- Consider using noise cancelling headphones so you're not distracted by what is going on around you.

Approach tasks positively

While you may not be motivated or excited by every task that you must do, if you approach them with a positive mindset, you will find it much easier.

Think about how completing the task may benefit you. Try to make the task engaging, or give yourself a reward to look forward to when you've completed the task.

What is the pomodoro technique?

The pomodoro technique is commonly used to encourage short sprints of focus, followed by short breaks, and repeating this cycle.

This helps you remain focused and productive, whilst also giving yourself the opportunity to take regular breaks.

Decide on the tasks you'd like to complete.

Work on your tasks for 25 minutes.

Take a 5 minute break.

Repeat this cycle of working followed by a short break 4 times.

Take a longer break (usually 1 hour).

How to create a productive work environment

Having a work environment in which there are a lot of distractions can take up a lot of your time and focus. People walking/talking around you, notifications from your devices and apps you're not using, and the general environment such as the temperature and noise level can all negatively affect focus.

Create an environment that works for you. Think of what your ideal work environment would be, and compare it to your current environment. What changes can you make?

Remove clutter

Reduce visual distractions

Reduce noise

Remove tech you don't need

Tell people you're working

Remove clutter

Some clutter is bound to accumulate when we're working, but when this gets unmanageable, it can become difficult to concentrate.

- Spend 5 minutes each day decluttering your desk.
- Identify if there are digital substitutes for any physical items you have, e.g. a planner or calendar.
- Throw away any rubbish immediately instead of letting it accumulate.

Remove visual distractions

We can easily become distracted by what it going on around us, such as people walking around the office. Think of ways in which you can shield your view.

- Use screens or dividers in open plan offices to create a barrier.
- Change the configuration of your desk so it isn't facing areas of high footfall.

Reduce noise

Offices can be quite noisy environments, with people talking, phones ringing, and noise coming from outside.

- Consider using noise cancelling headphones, or playing music without lyrics to block out noise.
- Perhaps go to an area where it is less noisy, such as a conference room.
- Schedule your more intensive tasks for times of the day when you know it is quieter.

Remove tech you don't need

While technology is beneficial to increasing efficiency, it can also prove quite distracting when constantly receiving notifications background apps.

- Instead of keeping your email open, specify times of day where you will check them.
- Close tabs you don't need to prevent browsing on irrelevant websites.
- Keep your phone away from your desk so you don't reach for it while working.
- Silence your notifications so you are less likely to open distracting apps.

Tell people you're working

When you are working in an office, it can be helpful to let others know that you're completing a high-focus task so they know not to disturb you. You can also signal this indirectly.

- Wear headphones so people are less likely to interrupt you.
- If you use online messaging systems such as Teams or Slack, you can update your online status to indicate that you're busy.

How to declutter your mind

Routines

Mindfulness

Write things down

Establish boundaries

Routines

Having routines reduces the likelihood of you experiencing decision fatigue, as your recurring daily tasks will become habits. For example, planning your meals for the week on a Sunday or having a set time of day to carry out recurring tasks.

Mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness can help you to become more aware of thoughts that are getting you down before starting to challenge them. Try to view your thoughts objectively, and determine whether they are helpful or appropriate for the situation.

Write things down

Writing your thoughts down can help you get things off your chest if you're feeling anxious, or just noting down a thought so you can return to it later.

Every time you have a thought that's unrelated to the task you're working on, write it down. Once you've completed your work, have a look at the distracting thoughts you had and determine if you need to action any of them.

Establish boundaries

Establishing boundaries for yourself can help you develop a more focused and disciplined mindset.

For example, having a clear division between your work and your personal life, and not bringing your work home with you. Or setting yourself a time limit for how long you can think about something before moving on from it.