Manage your environment – **Distractions and interruptions** some of the biggest threats to attention. In today’s world we are surrounded by so many sources of stimulation including the TV, computer, cell phone, radio, etc. Taking steps to manage these distractions and interruptions can be very helpful in improving attention and thereby improving memory.

Do one thing at a time –

**Multi-tasking is a myth!** Our brains really don’t seem to process more than one thing at a time. What may feel like multi-tasking, for example checking your email while having a conversation, really seems to just involve your brain switching rapidly back and forth between the two tasks. Studies even in young people suggest that this type of processing reduces performance by almost a full IQ category (10-15 points, say from average to low average), which for some people is about the same as being high on marijuana. This inability to multitask the way we think we can is also starting to influence public policy in terms of limiting cell phone use while driving. Texting has received a lot of focus, but talking may be just a bad.

In addition to not being very efficient, **multi-tasking is now viewed by some brain researchers as being toxic for your brain**. All of the rapid attention switching can be fatiguing and even stressful, which can lead to an increase in the release of stress hormones. As you will learn in the Emotional Module, chronic exposure to stress hormones is toxic to brain cells, so doing one thing at a time may also help you preserve your cognitive reserve in addition to enhancing your attention and memory.

Bribe yourself –

Often we have trouble paying attention simply because we are not motivated to do so. Sometimes we don’t admit this and just get mad at ourselves for not being able to pay attention. But surely you can think of examples where you had trouble concentrating simply because there was something else you would much rather be doing. So increase your motivation to pay attention by creating some sort of reward (or bribe).

Psychological researchers are discovering that attention can be improved through both external and internal motivators, and you can exact some control over these motivators by “**bribing yourself to pay attention**.”

An old psychological principle called the “Premack Principle” is something you can use to increase your motivation in a lot of areas and in this case your attention. Simply put, the Premak Principle involves setting a rule that you have to earn something that is highly rewarding by doing something that in itself is not highly rewarding. **Say for instance one of your goals to increase your brain fitness is to read the newspaper every morning, but you have a really hard time motivating yourself to sit down and pay attention to it. On the other hand, you really like taking a shower in the morning & rarely miss that.** You can use the Premack Principle to set the condition that you have to “earn” your shower by really attending to the newspaper for 15 minutes.

Get Plenty of Rest - Feeling tired, either by not sleeping well or from mental fatigue, can limit our attention. **People who do not get enough, good quality sleep perform considerably worse on tests of attention**, which can have a big impact on important tasks such as driving. **Too little sleep has also been linked with a higher risk for stroke and a lower life expectancy**. Even if you sleep enough hours, if you snore or have to wake frequently to go to the restroom or nap during the day, **the quality of your sleep may be limiting your attention or affecting your health**. Seeing a sleep specialist could pay large dividends for your brain health.

Resting your brain doesn’t just involve sleep. Our brains get tired from too much attention, so just like our muscles, they need time to recover. This means that **learning to “turn your brain off” or taking little “attention breaks” can also help your attention**. Many of the techniques that you will learn over the next few weeks will teach you strategies for resting your brain even when you are awake, which may to be just as important as getting enough sleep.

Finally, it is also important to remember that emotions can interrupt our attention! Feeling anxious or being distracted by self-criticism or worried thoughts is often one of the biggest robbers of our attention. **So learning to relax is also very important for improving attention**. You will learn more about caring for your emotions and dealing with stress in the coming weeks.