

# Concentration Tips

## Be motivated

- We concentrate better on something if we are motivated to do it and enjoy doing it. Try to see an enjoyable side to the activity you are doing, and try to link it in to goals/aims that you hold dear.

## Be well organized

- Try to be organized into a routine, so that you do set things at set times of the day, and set things on set days of the week.
- Try to be organized where you live and work - have set places where you put things, have these places labelled if possible, always put things away after you use them, etc.



## Don't overload yourself



- Don't overload yourself with too many things to do - do one thing at a time.
- Break a big job into smaller, easily achievable parts. Write these down on a piece of note-paper, or on a white board, with times for each activity. Set yourself a goal of finishing each part at a set time, and then move on to the next part. Do not leave something half-done.
- Don't rush tasks – take your time, and pace yourself.
- Have regular breaks. If you are sitting down for a while, stretch your legs and walk around. If your eyes have been focused on close-up material, look out of a window for a while.
- Know your good times, and good days. Do difficult tasks when you are feeling relaxed and fresh. Keep simple tasks for when you are tired or not feeling so good.

## Check carefully



- If you are doing something that involves different activities in sequence, such as cooking a meal, make up a check-list of things to do, put it in a prominent place, and tick off each thing after you do it.
- Allow for the possibility that you may run out of time, or that things may not go according to plan. Don't panic if things go wrong.
- From time to time, make sure that everything is going to plan.
- If you are doing a task where you might easily make mistakes – such as checking figures in a bank account – double-check your answers, or get someone else to check them.

## Stay on track

- If you find your concentration wanders from one minute to the next, use a watch timer or a kitchen timer that goes off every 10 mins to remind you to keep on track. Gradually increase the time before any alarm goes off. Watches or other devices that vibrate at set intervals can also be used as ways to cue you to stay on track.
- If your mind is often wandering when doing something, put up a little sign in front of you – KEEP ON TRACK – or repeat this phrase to yourself every now and again.
- If you find your eyes wandering when talking to someone, try to maintain eye-contact by focusing on their eyes. If your mind wanders in a conversation, try asking yourself questions about what is being said, or try to link it to something you find interesting. If someone is speaking too fast, ask them to slow down or repeat what they have said.
- If you have difficulty concentrating when reading, asking questions and making notes at the time that you read may help you to concentrate better. If you are reading a novel, you could make brief notes on a bookmark, perhaps one with Post-It tape stuck on. If you are reading as part of a course, you could summarise key points on an index card, and keep these cards for future reference. Try to link what you are reading to something interesting or meaningful to you.



## Avoid distractions

- Choose the environment that suits you best. Usually a quiet setting with no distractions (e.g. TV or people talking) is better for concentrating on an activity, such as reading. If you find that ear plugs/headphones help, then use them. If you are in a room at home, have a DO NOT DISTURB sign on the door. Remove any clutter from your desk. Avoid working near a window, as there may be distractions from outside. If you work better when together with others who are also working, such as in a library, then work there. If your mind wanders during a lecture, sitting in the front is usually better for concentration.



- If you concentrate better when someone else is doing a similar thing, try to discuss your work with him/her, and do it jointly if possible.
- Some people find that playing board games or computer games helps their concentration. While this may not apply to everyone, there is no harm in trying this, if only to boost your self-confidence for being able to concentrate over a period of time. Start off with shorter/simpler games, and then move on to longer/more complicated ones.

## Take it easy



- If you are anxious about something and it is affecting your concentration, try to deal with it. Use any relaxation techniques you have learned. If it is constantly on your mind, divert your mind onto other things or do something more relaxing, such as listening to music.
- If your concentration lets you down or you do something badly, try to stay calm. Figure out what you did wrong, and decide how you can do better next time. Be Patient - Be Positive – Persevere ('P-P-P').
- If you do well, tell yourself this, and give yourself a little treat. This will help you realise that you are getting better, and will help to improve your self-confidence.
- Try to take part in sports and recreational activities, especially those that involve being with other people. Remember to use family members, close friends, psychologists, etc to help you out if you get into real difficulties.

*© Narinder Kapur, January 2011*

The advice in this leaflet should be considered in the context of your own particular circumstances and any other support or advice that you receive