

MAY I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE?

4 EASY TIPS YOU CAN USE TO BOOST FOCUS AND REV UP RECALL

TOTAL BRAIN HEALTH INSIGHTS

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I was recently asked if there is just one thing everyone could do to rev up their recall, especially after so many months (ok, even years) of feeling so distracted and scattered. Fortunately, I had an easy answer – it's all about attention. If we focused more effectively on the things we want to retain, we would remember them better.

Of course, improving attention is not quite that easy. Let's face it, life is full of distractions. We have many things competing for our awareness. Think about how many times you've been interrupted – or have interrupted yourself! – over the past hour alone. Perhaps you got a snack, checked your text messages, or took a phone call. In the time that I've been working on this piece alone I've had to answer a call, help my son edit a paper, and of course check email so I don't miss anything life altering (hey, you never know).

On top of these tempting distractions, add other attention zappers that sometimes feel less within our control, such as how we sleep or feeling stressed or anxious about something. These are just a few of the lifestyle factors that can frazzle our focus, making it less likely we will remember what someone said, or where we left our keys. Aging can also contribute to the problem. As we gain years, it can be harder to sustain our focus.

Finally, we rarely consider how essential attention is to memory. Why? Well, consider for a moment what it takes to remember. First, we must learn the things that we want to recall later. And that process requires – you've got it! – attention. Most often the problem isn't that we forget, but rather than we didn't "get" the name or directions in the first place.



The good news is that we can all build better attention – and that it isn't hard to do. And boosting your focus can do wonders for your recall. Here are 4 easy steps you can take to build better attention and memory starting now:

- 1. Pay attention to your attention.** Be aware when you want to remember something for later, such as where you parked your car or the address where you are meeting someone for lunch. Then hit an intentional pause and bring your focus to that moment to make sure you effectively get the information.
- 2. Train your attention.** Research shows we can improve our focus with training, no matter our age. Try game-based training that challenges attention. Playing against the clock is one of my favorite options, as we must stay focused and be fast and nimble in our thinking to do well (and we have fun, which makes the training go faster!).
- 3. Pay attention to how you live.** Daily factors such as fatigue, poor diet, social isolation, and emotional distress can really drain your attention. Think about the daily choices that may be affecting your attention. You can experience a significant boost to focus and even memory ability by leading a lifestyle that supports healthy attention.
- 4. Stop Overtasking!** The human brain is still, well, human! There is only so much we can handle at one time. Protect your attention and your time with some easy strategies that keep you from over-dividing your attention. For example, I use the “do not disturb” setting on my computer when I need to concentrate on a project or have a deadline. This gives me longer chunks of time without the distraction of emails or messages (which invariably are not life altering). Put “do not disturb” signs up when you are working on things that require focus. And try rewarding yourself with a favorite distraction (a game, a walk around the block) when you've successfully completed a task and are ready for a break.

In fact, now that I've finished this article, I think it's time to refill my water bottle. Here's to paying better attention to our attention!

President and founder of Total Brain Health, Cynthia R. Green, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist, author and nationally recognized expert on memory fitness and brain health.

Learn more at totalbrainhealth.com



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