



Trauma
Care

Newsletter

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To Fidget or not to Fidget

The Power of the Fidget: Using Movement & Stimulation to Improve Focus

How many times have you been told (or told you children to, “Sit Still, be quiet, and pay attention”? Probably more than you can count!

Traditionally, we been told that being still is an essential element of attention, and that movement is a distraction that hampers attention. What we know now is actually quite the opposite! For many of us, stillness may actually hamper attention.

Research has shown that engaging in an activity that uses a sense other than what’s required for your primary task can enhance focus and improve performance. We call these secondary-type tasks “Fidgets” and, in ADD Coaching, we expand that definition of fidgets beyond physical movement (like doodling or squeezing a stress ball) to other kinds of sensory input that is in addition to that from the primary activity, like listening to music while doing homework. Experts now tell us that fidgets can help us focus—regardless of whether we or not have ADD/ADHD.

There are a myriad of ways you can learn to harness the “Power of the Fidget” to improve focus and concentration, and the benefits go beyond the classroom and well beyond childhood, as well. Finding what works best for you or your child may take a bit of trial and error, but the payoff can be tremendous!



Guidelines for Fidgets

There are a few important guidelines that will help you or your child get the most benefit from fidgeting:

First, fidgeting must be an intentional activity (the unconscious wiggling and leg-shaking many of us do, for instance, is not nearly as effective as intentional fidgeting)

Second, fidgeting must be done considerately, so as not to disturb others (clicking a pen may be a great fidget choice when you're reading at home, but not during a meeting or in a classroom); and

Third, choose to fidget in a way that complements but does not compete with the primary task (i.e., trying to listen to music in ear buds would compete for your sense of hearing if you're trying to focus on a lecture, but music in your ear buds may be a great choice for other kinds of work).



Specific Strategies

Effective “Fidgets” can be categorized by the kind of sensory input they provide. Here are a few examples of activities or strategies that fit into general sensory categories:

Movement: Any time you can incorporate movement into an activity, you're likely to have improved focus & concentration. Fidgets that incorporate movement can include: rocking, swinging, swaying, sitting on an exercise-ball, chewing gum, finger-typing and doodling;

Touch: Items that provide touch or tactile stimulation can be great for discrete fidgeting, such as: fabrics with different textures (velour, satin, or one side of a piece of Velcro®), gummy art erasers, stretchy rubber toys, stress balls, pipe cleaners, string/cords, silly putty/clay, or coiled keychain bracelets;



Proprioception (or the ability to sense the position, orientation and movement of the body and its parts) : Activities that increase the feeling of or challenge gravity incorporate the sense of proprioception, and can be great for improving focus, such as: balancing on a wobble or balance board, balance beam, weighted blankets/vests/pads, and push-ups (including traditional, chair, or wall push-ups);

Visual: things that provide additional visual stimulation can be helpful (both real and virtual), such as: fish tanks, a flickering candle or lava lamp, a fire in the fireplace, a pendulum, or simply providing a variety of colored paper or pens/pencils: and

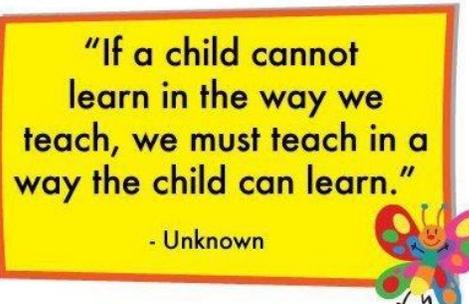
Smell: Olfactory stimulation, such as aromatherapy, can also improve focus and attention. Mint is refreshing, while lavender is calming. But you don't have to spend a fortune in special oils to get the benefit: experiment with what may already be in your spice cabinet: some cinnamon, cloves, or a few drops of vanilla in a pot of warm water may be worth a try;

Taste: Different tastes can also help us focus. An easy way to experiment is with different kinds of hard candy (sweet, sour, spicy, minty, etc.) or different flavors of gum; and

Sound: Auditory stimulation can be tremendously helpful to some of us, such as: white noise, rhythmic sounds (drumming, running water, nature sounds, metronome, or clock), whirring sounds (fans, street traffic, or motors) or music. For many of us, the right music in the background can work wonders for attention and energy or motivation, and the music that works best for you or your child may surprise you, so don't be afraid to experiment!

Research also suggests that activities that provide multiple kinds of sensory input are best at improving focus—like chewing gum while doing homework on an exercise ball, rocking, or swaying, or adding activities that increase pressure or require Balance to other fidgets can be even more beneficial. So get creative, and see what you can do to incorporate all different kinds of sensory input when you or your child to focus, concentrate or learn—at home, in school, at the office, or on the bench at the rugby/cricket game.

There's no limit to where and when these techniques can be helpful! So, get creative, and start to build your own arsenal of tools that can help you or your child harness the "Power of the Fidget!"



This newsletter has been issued by:

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Play Therapy * Counselling * Trauma Counselling

Please note that this information must not be used for diagnostic purposes. Please visit a medical professional for a correct diagnosis.