How to Keep Your Mind Sharp for Work

By Chris Palmer and Jazmin Garcia

Is your mind sharp, alert, and focused throughout the entire work day? If you're anything like me, the answer's no. You get sleepy, your brain feels sluggish, and occasionally you feel off your game for the whole day. Fortunately, there are some actions you can take to keep your mind focused and creative for work, and it all starts at home:

1. **Sleep.** Make sure you log enough hours of sleep every night. The amount one requires varies from person to person and can vary from 6 to 10 hours a night. Find out how much sleep is best for you because without sufficient sleep, you'll find it harder to focus, make decisions, and even get along with colleagues. Do yourself and your co-workers a favor and get a good night's rest.

2. **Exercise.** Physical exercise is not only good for your body but good for your brain as well. Exercise can help boost creativity and lift you out of bad moods. If you experience drowsiness after lunch, try walking briskly for a few minutes and stretching. This small burst of exercise can shake off that sleepiness and get you back on track for the rest of the work day.

3. **Exercise your brain.** Sometimes we think only our heart and muscles need activity, but our brain is a powerful organ that needs to be kept stimulated, too. Try memorizing a few phone numbers instead of immediately reaching for your phone's contact list. Mentally tally up your purchases at the store, challenge yourself with a crossword puzzle, or make it a point to recall the names of everyone you've met throughout the day. There are also plenty of online games to challenge your mind, such as Lumosity.com. If you have kids, a memory card game or flash cards are fun.

4. **Learn something new and be a lifelong learner.** We might not all have time to learn a new language or instrument, but try a new recipe. Pick up chess, listen to a radio station in a different language, or learn new words—put another way, venture outside your comfort zone. The brain craves information, and the more you challenge it, the more it will gain strength and power. My father learned Spanish in his spare time in his 60s.

5. **Create a to-do list.** If you find yourself forgetting what you must accomplish for the day or neglecting your top priority task, write a to-do list. It will de-clutter your mind and leave "head-room" for more important tasks.

6. **Limit distractions.** Once at work, leave whatever distractions you can at the door. It's hard to unplug from friends and family, but don't be afraid to close off your social websites, especially when you have an approaching deadline. If staying off social websites proves difficult, use them as a reward, "I've finished four items from my to-do list, so I'll allow myself five minutes on Facebook". Many of us use social websites for work, so if you can't sign out, turn off notifications, and make yourself "unavailable". It's a lot more difficult to complete a task when there are lots of other things fighting for your attention.

7. **Eat and drink healthily.** Drink plenty of water and don't forget to eat! Many times, I rush from one meeting to the next ignoring my stomach. Before I knew better, I would grab a chocolate chip cookie or another unhealthy snack to hold me over. Let's face it, it's hard to focus with a growling stomach. For hectic days, keep healthy snacks like nuts, carrots, and raisins at the office.

Keep your mind sharp, and it will benefit your career and enrich your life.

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