Hey Alice,

I am a junior in college. I am pre-med which means I study all the time. However, I can really only focus when I study at night. When I study during the day, it seems that I cannot recall as much information as opposed to studying late at night. How come I can't stay focused during the day? What should I do to help me concentrate during the day?

? Night Owl

Answer

Dear Night Owl,

Judging by your study habits, you may get the most out of this response if you read it at night. That suggestion, however, seems as practical as saying you should become nocturnal and only study after the sun sets. So, let's work with your current situation and see how it might be improved. One question you may want to explore is what is it about studying at night that helps you focus? Taking stock of those factors may help you recreate them during your daytime study sessions.

Other strategies you may want to experiment with to help train your brain include:

- **Set a schedule.** One reason why you may find it easier to study at night is because you've gotten into the habit. Try writing out a schedule of the studying you want to get done and vary the subject matter to keep it interesting. Once your mind gets used to daytime studying, you may find that focus and concentration come naturally.
- **Take Breaks.** Studying is a necessary part of school, but make sure to allow yourself some rest time, too! Take a five to ten minute break every hour or so. Go for a walk to get your body moving and your heart pumping. Physical movement increases circulation of oxygen to your brain and may help you get back down to business.
- **Mix It Up.** Spending a long time focusing on one subject may be wearing, so switch between study topics every once in a while to reinvigorate your mind. Also, finding something that interests you about each subject may cut down on the tedium of studying and help you focus.
- **Reward Yourself.** Being a student is tough work! Give yourself a pat on the back. No, seriously. Set study goals for yourself (e.g., finishing a problem set or a text book chapter) and when you complete them, allow yourself to catch up on Facebook or have your favorite snack.
List adapted from Kansas State University [2].

Other factors to consider are:

- The amount of light in your work space (more light helps maintain focus)
- The comfort of your study space (studying in a super comfy space like your bed is a surefire way to lose concentration? naptime, anyone?)
- Outside distractions (try separating yourself from roommates, cell phones, computers, or anything else that may steal your attention)
- General health (getting seven to nine hours of sleep a night, getting a reasonable amount of physical activity, and eating a balanced diet may play a role in energy levels which, in turn, could affect your concentration)

Working to create an environment conducive to studying may go a long way in helping you maintain your concentration. Furthermore, if you designate one spot for studying, your mind may begin to associate that place with a mental "study mode." Libraries tend to be many college students’ preferred study stations, but if that doesn't work for you, try working in designated study rooms in campus buildings or residence halls. Plenty of options and locations exist for you to explore. Experiment and find what works best for you.

Whereas these techniques may help, there are other considerations to take into account. One question to ask yourself is what is distracting you? If your studies are stressing you out or making you feel anxious, thus leading to your concentration conundrums, there may be other ways to address this issue. It may be worth contacting a counselor to explore what else might be contributing to difficulties concentrating.

For you and all the other "night people" out there stuck in a day-focused world, there are options. A major key is setting a time and a place to study and getting into the habit. It's okay if you need a little help getting into this routine, but once you do, you may find that's all you need to hunker down and learn!

Alice!

Category:
General Health [3]
Miscellaneous [4]

Related questions

Procrastination [5]
Losing sleep over sleeping pills? Will I become dependent on them? [6]
Burning the candle at both ends? using stimulant drugs to study [7]
Stressed out and anxious from schoolwork and everything [8]

Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [9]
Mental Health Service (CUMC) [10]
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