

# Attention

Attention is our ability to choose to focus a task or situation that is relevant to us. Having difficulty with attention makes it hard to remember, learn or do the things we want to do. Things like pain, fatigue and mood can affect how well we can pay attention. Using some of the strategies listed, can help you manage your attention and have more success with your daily tasks.

There are 5 levels of attention, listed in order of basic to most complex:

1. *Focused Attention* – able to focus on something in your environment like a sound
2. *Sustained Attention* – being able to focus on one task for an extended period of time
3. *Selective Attention* – being able to focus on a task even with something distracting in the background
4. *Alternating Attention* – able to switch between tasks. Shows mental flexibility. If you have difficulty in this area, you may be slower to shift your attention from one task to another, and may find difficulty with conversations.
5. *Divided Attention* – being able to focus on multiples tasks/activities at the same time. If you have difficulty in this area, you may have difficulty driving and having a conversation or cooking and listening to the news at the same time.

\*The more complex the level of attention, the more energy it will require. i.e. Divided attention will require the most energy.

To help your attention:

- *Focus on one task at a time whenever possible.*
  - It's hard to keep track of more than one thing at a time.
  - This takes the least amount of energy and will allow you to be more successful.
  
- *Break down bigger complicated tasks.*
  - Take the time to plan out the steps to complete the task.
  
- *Remind yourself where you left off.* (i.e. a bright sticky note, turn the pages over and place them on your chair) You can be interrupted, so plan to remind yourself.
  
- *Quiet environments are helpful.*
  - Having to constantly choose between a distraction and your work is more taxing on your energy and makes the task harder to complete.
  
- *Take a break.*
  - Often fatigue makes it hard to pay attention. If you're rereading things over and over, it's best to take a break and try again later.