

ADDitudeMag.com

When ADHD Kids Fidget: Better Focus Through Multitasking

ADHD adults and children may actually concentrate, focus and stay on task better with a little foot-tapping, gum-chewing fidgeting.

by Roland Rotz, Ph.D., Sarah D. Wright

"Focus!" "Mind over matter!" "You can do anything if you really want to!" "Just try harder!"

Adults and children with attention deficit disorder (ADHD) have all heard these exhortations, and have probably shared them with others struggling to concentrate at work or focus at school. The ADHD brain is indeed a powerful force for success.

But we know that relying on the brain can be frustrating and, at times, demoralizing. Our ADHD brains aren't our most reliable asset -- allowing distractions to break our focus. But what if there were strategies that could prime our brains beyond "just trying harder"?

There are. Recent research suggests that the body affects the brain as much as the brain affects the body. In his recent book, *Spark*, John Ratey, M.D., shows that physical activity increases levels of the neurotransmitters dopamine and norepinephrine in the way ADHD medications do. Both chemicals play a key role in sharpening focus and increasing attention.

Sydney Zentall, Ph.D., of Purdue University, studied the factors that help ADHD children succeed in the classroom. In *ADHD and Education*, she notes that attention "deficit" increases with the length, familiarity, and repetitiveness of a task. In other words, you tune out when tasks get boring!

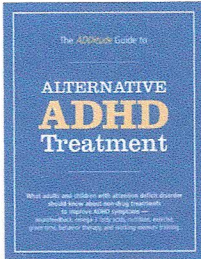
According to Zentall, an activity that uses a sense other than that required for the primary task — listening to music while reading a social studies textbook — can enhance performance in children with ADHD. Doing two things at once, she found, focuses the brain on the primary task.

Zentall calls these sensory-motor activities "distractions." We call them fidgets — mindless activities you can do while working on a primary task. We're not talking about wriggling in your seat. Fidgeting is more intentional. It's pacing or doodling while on the phone or chewing gum while taking a test.

Multitasking for ADDers

It's true that many people are successful only when they do one thing at a time, but for adults and children with ADHD the opposite is usually true. We need to respect the fact that there is neural diversity, that different people have different ways of doing things — not from preference or contrariness, but from need.

Fidgeting works for many children with ADHD. Karen was surprised to find that her bright son, who had been doing poorly in high school, suddenly started getting As. While delighted with his grades, she couldn't figure out what had changed. The only thing that was different was his wearing a hooded sweatshirt to school. She eventually discovered that her son was secretly listening to music on his iPod, under that hood. The



SIGN ME UP
for a free copy of...

**The ADDitude
Guide to
Alternative
ADHD
Treatment**

