



Peninsula Chinese Business Association

美國華聯商會

Leading because we care

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Dear Members and Friends:

“Your brain is a three-pound supercomputer capable of almost unlimited power to learn, remember, and solve problems. Yet, like any other body part, it gradually slows with age. Over time, people may find it harder to perform certain thinking skills, especially the ability to concentrate and focus.”

Source: Harvard Medical School

The anecdote above describes what can happen to anyone. Work performance and social ambitions are less mentally stimulating when metabolism slows down. The result could make focus and organization challenging to accomplish. We must pay attention to the symptoms of slowing cognitive function. Some examples include missing daily medication, misplacing personal belongings, and not paying enough attention to safety precautions. Extreme examples to be cautious of include mismanaging personal finances, missed appointments or scheduling overlapping meetings.

Per the research, there may be ways we can improve cognitive function:

First, avoid multitasking. You do not need to say no to tasks, but do them one at a time. That way, the mind doesn't have to compete with other stimuli. Second, be mindful of distractions. Put away your phone and place a Do Not Disturb sign on your door. Third, find out when you have the most focus during the day (it takes time and patience to discover this). Block those times for problem-solving and strategic thinking. For myself, a morning shower is the best time for planning. When I close my eyes and listen to the running water, my senses are heightened compared to the rest of the day. I find it easier to anchor myself in the present while in the shower.

Small breaks are essential to include in your daily routine. Go for a walk, meditate, relax with a cup of hot tea, call a friend, anything to give your brain new assignments. These habits keep your thinking skills sharp.

Breathing is a powerful tool that can help with problem-solving. Though many hear of this technique, few do it correctly. Start by breathing in through your nose and allowing the air to fill up your lungs. Then, breathe out slowly through your mouth. Prolonging your exhale and doing it more forcefully than your inhale can slow the heart rate and calm the body. Conversely, if you breathe in longer and more forcefully than exhaling, you become more alert. When you practice these techniques regularly, you can calm your mind and improve the clarity in which you think.

Be sure also to give your brain rest. Seven to nine hours of sleep around the same time every night is critical for cognitive recovery. Having a glance at the next day's tasks before turning off the light will help you focus on moving forward to a new day.

Not all medications are safe. Check possible side effects and discuss with a physician if needed.

Coffee drinkers - watch your caffeine intake. Studies show caffeine can temporarily increase attention, but too much can make you jittery, anxious and distract thinking.

Per Harvard Medical School, practicing mindfulness can improve focus. Some methods include:

1. Bringing attention to the sensations in the body, both physical and emotional. Pay attention to what you see, hear, feel, smell and taste
2. Carrying on with only the task at hand, slowly and deliberately
3. If the mind wanders away from the current activity, gently refocus the attention back on the sensation of the moment
4. Practicing breathing

Take care of your brain and stay healthy.

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