

## parents ask

By Dan Williams PT, CSCS, BCN

Experts respond to readers' questions with helpful suggestions and information.

**Q:** "My 7 year old has a terrible attention span. I know this is very common for many kids this age, but what are some ways that I can help him with this?"

Sarah, Mesa

**A:** Attention span is the amount of time an individual can continuously concentrate or focus on a particular task without becoming distracted. Older children and adults should have the ability to sustain a longer attention span than younger children. All children have difficulty focusing every now and then but if the child is constantly struggling with the lack of focus or concentration and having trouble completing tasks or reaching goals, a multi-disciplinary approach should be considered to improve attention span. Read on for some suggestions.

### Dietary modifications

1. The cleaner and more organic the diet, the better for the mind and body.
2. Avoid processed foods, sugars, sodas, artificial sugar substitutes, junk/fast foods, foods with artificial colors, additives and preservatives, foods grown with pesticides, etc.
3. Replace sugary foods/drinks with fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, eggs and healthy snacks.
4. Drink plenty of water.
5. Identify and address any food allergies.
6. Smaller, more frequent meals are better.
7. A nutritious breakfast is important.



### Sleep

1. Ten or more hours per night.
2. Stick to a consistent sleep schedule/routine.
3. Reduce or abolish technology and anything that emits blue light or electromagnetic fields in the bedroom as these currents can interfere with sleep.

### Exercise

1. Consistent daily exercise is best.
2. A minimum amount of three to four days per week for at least 20 to 30 minutes.
3. Moderate-high intensity tends to be the best.
4. Make it fun.
5. Suggested activities include riding a bicycle, jumping on a trampoline, martial arts, team sports, running or brisk walking.
6. Consistency and routine are important.
7. Consider children's yoga or breathing exercises and teach good posture.

### Home Suggestions

1. Establish routines for homework, activities, sleep, meals, etc.
2. Teach your child to organize study materials.
3. Provide an environment suitable for homework including a table and chair and limit distractions.
4. Provide motivation/positive reinforcement.
5. Monitor and refocus as necessary.
6. Be consistent with daily rule.
7. Pursue the child's interests.
8. Encourage reading and/or reading to or with the child for consistently longer periods.
9. Encourage arts, crafts and music.
10. Play word games and puzzles as a family.

### Classroom suggestions

1. Position seating away from the window, doorway or any noisy equipment (i.e. audiovisual equipment).
2. Minimize visual and auditory distractions.
3. Be sure that the child can easily see the teacher's face so he/she can use visual cues.
4. Adjust the chair and table to a height suitable for the best performance.
5. Help the child develop organizational skills by having a consistent place to store materials once he/she has completed a task.
6. Monitor and refocus as needed.

### Brain training therapies

1. Cognitive retraining affects working memory, which has been directly correlated with attention span.
2. Neurofeedback has shown to be efficacious for attention and improving brain function.
3. A QEEG or brain map is used to gather information on the individual's brainwave pattern and designate specific protocols for neurofeedback training.

### Supplements

1. EHT
2. Omega 3s and fish oil
3. Amino acids
4. Multivitamins
5. Probiotics

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