The Benefits of ADHD Fidgeting

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Understanding Fidgeting and ADHD

Over the years there have been many recommendations to ensure high levels of focus and attention, such as sitting up straight, keeping the room quiet, and not fidgeting. If the focus and attention could be maintained, memory would improve and your ability to recall information would increase. Whether you were a student trying to ace your spelling test, or an adult hoping to impress your boss at a meeting, these steps were the rules to follow.

For many people, these recommendations have led to great success. For other people, they serve as an impossible task that can never be achieved.

The people who have the hardest time with focus during calm, still conditions are people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). People with ADHD need another set of recommendations that are practical and appropriate for their life — one that sets them up for success, rather than failure.

There is a growing school of thought that points towards the use of fidgets and fidgeting to improve attention and concentration. A fidget often refers to an object that can be held to stimulate an improved level of attention.

The belief is that if something is only minimally engaging, like a boring lecture, the brain is not fully invested. By adding an engaging fidget, the brain will increase its investment in the stimuli, but the attention to the fidget itself will be marginal.

Fidgets Focused on Senses

People can find fidgets all around them including:

Visual

When you look around an office or a school, there are visual fidgets already in place that aid in attention. Items that are brightly colored like sticky notes, highlighters and folders will help grab your attention to complete the task. Doing something like peeking out of a window may aid in attention as well. Obviously, staring out of the window in a daydream will not be an asset. Be sure to limit your glances.

Auditory

Adding sounds to a room can boost concentration and learning for people with and without ADHD. Different types of music might be helpful for different tasks or situations.

A white noise machine or the ticking of a clock or a metronome can produce desired results as well. If these are not available, you can work to become more aware of the other sounds around like the cars driving by or the humming of the lights.

Oral

In this category, you can experiment with a range of tastes, temperatures and textures to study the results. For example, drinking ice water might yield a completely different response than a hot cup of coffee. A piece of sour candy will differ from something spicy like cinnamon. Chewing gum or biting on your pen cap can create enough added stimulation to get through your meeting.

Scent

Many people are affected by particular aromas as they can be related to memories. Lighting candles, warming tarts, using hand lotions, or air fresheners can spark your focus.

Next page: things to consider when deciding to use a fidget

Fidgets Focused on Senses

Like with other sensory stimuli mentioned before, the object here will be to mix and rotate through different smells and different sources of smells. After a period, your nose will be accustomed to the scent at a level that you will no longer notice the fragrance. To avoid this phenomenon, a variety of smells will be your ally.

Kinetic

It might seem like moving will hinder your attention rather than help, but certain movements are associated with lower levels of inattention. Walking and standing are good examples of a kinetic fidget. Twisting or rocking in a chair or swinging on a swing can have the same results.

Feel

Here, the fidgets will be something you can touch or hold. Generally, they will be small and have a unique or distinct shape, texture or softness. Your touch fidget can be as simple as a paperclip or as complex as a specially designed fidget purchased online. Tossing a ball or doodling on paper with a pen can accomplish your attention goals.

Special Considerations

If you are interested in making fidgets work in your life, think through these special considerations.

Provide an Explanation

People in your life may not have ever heard of a fidget and have no understanding of their use. In fact, they might see your fidgeting as a distraction that is rude or counterproductive.

Like many other situations, a little information can go a long way towards prevention. Explain your situation and the goal of the fidget as an aid.

Experiment

There are endless possible options when it comes to fidgets. It is true that not everyone will work for you, but if you remain patient and optimistic, you can find a handful that end with good results.

During your experimentation, be sure to attempt fidgets from all of the categories described above while tracking the results. Additionally, attempting these in multiple settings will give you a better understanding of their impact.

School Settings

A lot of people with ADHD and their parents will be interested in using fidgets in a classroom setting. The acceptance of fidgets in the classroom will likely vary widely by district and teacher.

Open a conversation with school personnel about the goals of fidgets. Be sure to communicate the low risk and potential for high reward for the student, teacher and entire classroom. When bringing a fidget into the classroom, focus on safety while keeping it small and silent. The fidget will likely be lost or misplaced during the school year, so consider ones that are relatively cheap and replaceable.

More and more people, both with ADHD and those in the medical community, are becoming more interested in the role of fidgets and what they have to offer. Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all fidget, but there is always room for trial and error. Allow yourself or your child to creatively consider appropriate options — a fidget might be their ticket to success.