moveSMART
Move smart. Work smart. Live smart.

Cognitive Benefits of Movement

How long do you sit at your desk, focussed on a task, without moving? The average attention span of an adult is 5-20 minutes. That means that after 5-20 minutes you are less focussed on—and less effective at—the work you are doing. It seems a no-brainer that we need to look for ways to help us maintain focus. As it turns out, even small changes can have big impacts, and getting out of your chair could be part of the answer.

The act of switching tasks can have an energizing effect, allowing us to refocus our attention. This can be switching from spread-sheeting to making a phone call, or it can be a physical shift, such as walking to get a glass of water or pick up something from a printer. A 2009 study found links between movement and problem solving, as well. To quote one of the researchers, Dr. Alehandro Lleras, "If you are stuck trying to solve a problem, take a break."

The shoe company giant New Balance reported improvements in engagement and concentration through a program to increase physical movement in the workplace, with the goal of some form of movement every 30 minutes.

Another study out of the University of Granada found young men who were physically active had better cognitive abilities in areas of attention and time perception compared to less active counterparts. Interestingly studies on children with ADHD have shown similar effects on attention. So exercising your body makes your brain stronger, too!

For more tips on how to incorporate more movement into your day, see our tip sheet moveSMART Movement Tips.

For more information:

Forbes: To Work Better, Just Get up from Your Desk
PsychCentral: Taking Breaks Found to Improve Attention
redOrbit: Attention Spans, Cognitive Ability Tied To Physical Activity, Health