



Tip Number Five: healthy body, healthy mind

“They constantly want food!”

Tip 1: Snacks and water for the day

Keep a water bottle with water (not juice) in on the child’s workspace and encourage them to take regular sips of water. Juice has too much sugar in and instead of helping them concentrate, does the opposite and can make it hard for children to focus.

Put the child’s healthy snacks for the whole day in either a lunchbox, Tupperware or bowl and let them eat from it throughout the day, choosing themselves when they want to dip into it. If you think it will all be gone within an hour then put the snack for the morning in the container then top up with the afternoon snacks at lunchtime. Be clear that when they have gone, there will be no more for that day.

What sort of snacks?

Well, these will change depending on what you have at home and what your child eats. Try hard to make sure they aren’t too high in sugar as this has a negative impact on their concentration. Try: sliced carrots, peppers, apples, celery, pears, grapes, cheese triangle, cheese slice (no more than a matchbox size per day), bread sticks, rice cakes, crackers etc. Anything with a crunch e.g.: carrots, really helps some children who need to have sensory feedback to help them concentrate.

“I have a battle most mornings to get them to sit down and do some work.”

Tip 2: A little fresh air and exercise before they sit down

Normally, for many of you, your child’s school day would have started by walking or scooting to school/breakfast club. This fresh air and exercise helps set up their brain for a positive learning attitude.

How can I replicate the outdoor commute to school?

If possible, have a 5 minute play, skip, run or scoot outside either in your back garden or on the pavement outside your front door (supervised by an adult). Maybe encourage them to do a few sets of star jumps outside. If this isn’t their thing, then encourage them to go outside and look up at the sky ... what can they see/hear? Ask them to relay to you what they could see/hear? The fresh air will help set them up for learning. In the morning when most children are alert is when teachers aim to get the maths and literacy learning done.

“How do I know what’s best to do when?”

Tip 3: Routines and visual timetables

Most children respond really well to having a visual timetable of how the day is going to run. This gives structure, reduces anxiety and mimics what we do in school. Some people find it works well to agree the timetable together. Write it on a piece of paper/whiteboard and put it up where your child can see it. Include the fun/less structured things on there too like choosing time, exercise breaks, playtime. For younger children you can substitute a symbol for the words. E.g.: reading will be the symbol of a book. Here’s an example of the cards that can be used with younger pupils: <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/T-C-004-Visual-Timetable-Nursery-FS1>

We know that lots of you are joining in with Joe Wick's exercise each morning. If you haven't tried it yet, it's a great way to get motivated for the day. The 30-minute sessions are called "PE with Joe". It is [streamed live on Wicks' YouTube channel](#) at 9am every weekday morning, and will not require any specialist equipment or large amounts of space. Many children will be ready to sit down and start school work after this; however, if you feel that this exercise is best done at a later point in the day to energise them, then it is absolutely fine to save it for later.

"How can I get them to focus more when doing their work?"

Tip 4: Play relaxing background music while children work – it help them and us too 🧘.

[Good background piano music for concentration](#) A calming long piece of music for all work.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2LDZBILkFlfcWnzPKmJGqG>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGyHddww6ew> Pachelbel's Canon in D Major (good to play when doing maths)

When memorising facts or figures, it is easier to remember the information when putting it into a rhyme or song. These catchy, musical elements will provide a hook to help a person recall these important details in a stressful situation. So it's no surprise that playing music in the background while doing work at home and school can aid learning and concentration. Most slow tempo music can create an atmosphere of focus. Research has shown that classical music (of 60—70 beats per minute) is especially helpful when doing maths. Here's a link to more research if this is of interest to you.

[More research into what music helps and why](#)

"They are so fidgety and can't sit still for long."

Tip 5: a) Employ a timer for short bursts of concentrated work/focus

Our school day is run by the bell. Giving children a time within which to complete their work often helps. This is where a timer comes in useful eg: a sand timer/an electric timer/phone timer. In school, each lesson lasts approximately an hour but remember that will include the teacher giving an input for up to 15 minutes and then gathering the class together at the end for feedback or a plenary. So realistically, the pupils are working solidly (ie: recoding written work) for from 10 minutes in Early Years to 30 minutes in upper Key Stage 2. After that they will need some type of movement break which offers them a chance to "reset".

Tip 5: b) Regular movement breaks

Recent research for GCSE aged pupils has found that 35 minutes of focussed revision is the optimum time to maximise learning before pupils require a short 5 minute break. So primary aged pupils are likely to need a break earlier than that.

I mentioned above that movement breaks offer children a chance to "reset." Examples of movement breaks are: star jumps, making a drink, singing along to a song, dancing to music, performing animal walks or playing Simon Says. You could slow it down by doing wall or chair push-ups or squeezing hands, shoulders or legs. Find what works for your child – it will be different for everyone.

Yoga: For slightly longer movement breaks, we find in school that the children love yoga. This site has a wide variety of story-led yoga sessions that range from a few minutes up to 30 minutes. Most of our children have used this site in school and will be able to follow Jamie's actions by themselves. It's a popular and healthy way of getting some peach and fitness into their day. [Cosmic kids](#)

Outside- fresh air: a quick run around or explore in the back yard, garden or on the balcony can do wonders for children's mental health and well-being. Why not give them some seeds or a plant to look after and they can go and water, take a look or check up on them in their movement breaks.