

# Fidget-to-Focus Strategies

**H**OW DO PEOPLE WITH ADHD and executive function challenges stay focused on important yet uninteresting tasks? Tasks they know they need to complete, but ones they find dull, tedious, and mundane? It's a question that clinical psychologist Roland Rotz has been exploring for decades, and a question he continues to ask those attending the adult ADHD support groups he leads, the local, regional, and national presentations he conducts, and some of the clients he sees in his private practice.

Dr. Rotz says that many of the ideas these folks identify involve what are called “simultaneous sensory-motor activities,” which are activities where two or more of our senses are involved—listening to a lecture while doodling in a notebook, for example, or doing homework while listening to intense electronic music with a heavy beat in the background. Some people find this distracting, but others say that it actually helps them focus. Dr. Rotz is quick to remind us, though, that there's no “one size that

fits all.” For some, a specific simultaneous sensory-motor strategy may work well, for others not so. And even for those who find a simultaneous sensory-motor strategy working well, it may not do so forever. Surprisingly, though, it could start working well again down the road.

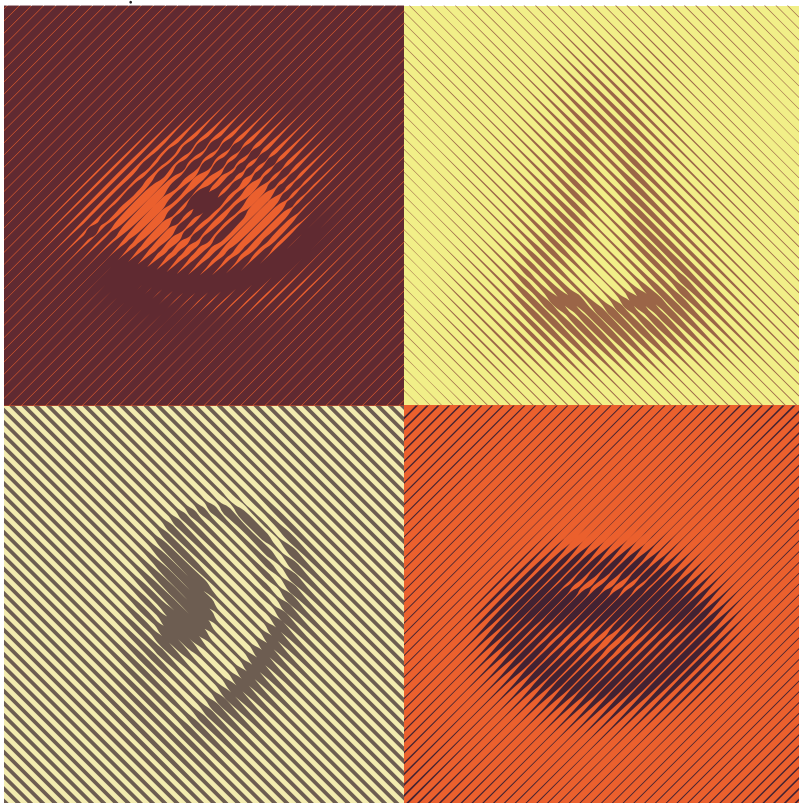
Fidgeting is a more familiar term that can be used to capture simultaneous sensory-motor activity. In other words, fidgeting can potentially help us focus—thus, the title of the book Dr. Rotz wrote with ADHD coach Sarah Wright, *Fidget to Focus*. The book provides a small sampling of the many different fidget-to-focus strategies he has documented over the years. A few of these are provided below. They divide them into areas involving movement, touch, sight, sound, taste, mouth, and smell. An additional area, referred to as companion strategies, is provided as well.

- **Movement strategies.** These include both large motor movements (walking or running) and fine motor movements (jiggling one's legs while listening to a speaker).

Movement strategies are both rhythmic and repetitive. Some people with ADHD say they focus better on conversations while walking. Experienced runners with ADHD also describe how much better they're able to focus after a run. Others mention how activities like yoga, aikido, and tai chi help them to pay attention. Movement strategies also encompass fine motor movements; examples include doodling or jiggling one's legs while listening to a lecture or taking notes. Fine motor movements can extend to the mouth region as well; chewing gum, for example.

- **Sight strategies.** To get through performing a particular task at home, some people describe turning the television on with no intention of watching it. The simultaneous visual and auditory stimulation helps them complete the task, or in some instances, to complete daily chores.

- **Sound strategies.** When trying to read a book, some people find white noise in the background to be soothing and relaxing rather than distracting. Others say they find personally selected music to be soothing and relaxing. Still others describe sounds they produce themselves during a tedious visual task,



sounds such as whistling, singing, or humming. Some college and graduate students describe the benefits of audiobooks, which allow them to both read a text and listen to the text read aloud at the same time.

- **Touch strategies.** For some individuals, the feel of different clothing textures helps them remain focused when having to listen for extended periods of time. It might be the feel of a silk shirt between their fingers or the material on a dress or pair of pants. Some describe how a hot shower in the morning will awaken their senses and help them remain focused on a task immediately after. Others mention the benefits of simply splashing cold water on their faces before engaging in a task.


- **Taste strategies.** Sipping on a favorite drink or eating a favorite snack are among the more common taste strategies.

- **Smell strategies.** Some individuals describe the positive benefits of lemon oil to increase alertness. Others mention room fresheners or scented candles.

- **Time strategies.** For some, setting a timer to complete a tedious task helps them complete the task successfully. Among the tasks mentioned are filing papers, clearing one's emails, responding to emails, and paying bills.

- **Companion strategies.** Many people with ADHD find that having someone join them as they set out to complete a task helps insure that they complete the task successfully. In addition to keeping them focused, it adds a feeling of accountability. The authors refer to this strategy as the ultimate fidget. Among the many examples they cite are exercise partners, study buddies, or having the company of a friend or family member when doing household chores.

The notion that people with ADHD and executive function challenges may actually focus better when engaged in simultaneous sensory-motor activities is counterintuitive, to say the least. But Dr.

Rotz has heard countless stories that bear this out. To learn more about fidget-to-focus strategies and the studies that support their benefits, readers are encouraged to contact him directly via email at [Roland@FidgettoFocus.com](mailto:Roland@FidgettoFocus.com). 




A clinical and consulting psychologist, **Mark Katz, PhD**, is the director of Learning Development Services, an educational, psychological, and neuropsychological center in San Diego, California. As a contributing editor to *Attention* magazine, he writes the *Promising Practices* column and serves on the editorial advisory board. He is also a former member of CHADD's professional advisory board and a recipient of the CHADD Hall of Fame Award.

#### REFERENCES


Rotz, Roland and Wright, Sarah D. (2005). *Fidget to focus: Outwit Your Boredom: Sensory Strategies for Living with ADD*. iUniverse: Lincoln, Nebraska.

Rotz, Roland and Wright, Sarah D. (June 2021). *The Body-Brain Connection: How Fidgeting Sharpens Focus*. <https://additudemag.com/focus-factors/>

## Become a Certified ADHD & Life Coach



Explore a Rewarding Career that Makes a Difference  
Attend our Complimentary Q&A Teleclass  
Visit us at:  
[ADDCA.com/Attention](http://ADDCA.com/Attention)



# ADHD PODCASTS



ADDRESS A VARIETY OF TOPICS ON ADHD

FOR PARENTS, TEENS, ADULTS, EDUCATORS, AND PROFESSIONALS

[PODCASTS.CHADD.ORG](http://PODCASTS.CHADD.ORG)