

## National Health Observances

### May

Family Wellness Month  
National Mental Health Month  
National Smile Month  
National Stroke Awareness Month  
Personal History Month  
Get Caught Reading Month  
National Family Month  
National Military Appreciation Month

### Week of May 1-7

Update Your References Week

### Week of May 6 - 12

National Anxiety & Depression Awareness Week  
Children's Mental Health Week  
National Family Week  
National Nurses Week

### Week of May 7 - 12

National Correctional Officer's Week

### Week of May 13 - 19

National Etiquette Week  
Reading is Fun Week  
National Women's Health Week

### June

Effective Communications Month  
National Smile Month  
National Safety Month  
Professional Wellness Month

## What is EAP?

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a **FREE** and **CONFIDENTIAL** service that can assist you and your eligible family members with **ANY** personal concern, large or small.

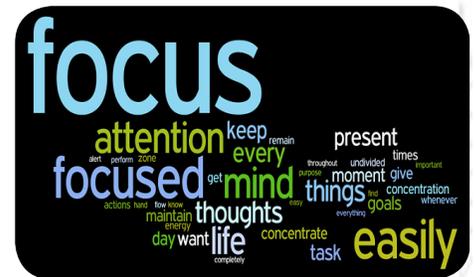
## Ability to Concentrate Isn't What It Used to Be?

When you are rolled into the operating room at the hospital, you want to know that the surgeon is ready to concentrate on your procedure. When you board a jetliner for your next vacation destination, you want to know that the tower crew is rested and ready to direct the pilot through dense airport traffic.

Concentration is vital in some professions. Even in our everyday lives, though, we all need to concentrate -- to avoid traffic accidents, to get the job finished, to remember important information. But with today's world filled with flashing images of MTV, quick news reports, and fast-food restaurants on every corner, are we capable of concentrating as well as we used to?

Before we answer that question, let's take a closer look at concentration, and its sibling, attention. Attention, says Richard Petty, M.D., professor of medicine at Georgia State University, is a global term, used to describe a state in which you are interested in everything going on around you. Concentration focuses that attention on one specific thing.

"It's called the cocktail party phenomenon," says Dr. Petty.



"When you're at a cocktail party, you have a high level of attention because you're excited to be at the party, but you concentrate on one conversation."

Attention and concentration developed in humans as defense mechanisms. Early humans had to be constantly vigilant or be eaten. But it's difficult to sustain a high level of attention for long periods of time without getting stressed out, Dr. Petty says.

Stress is good in small quantities, but too much stress leads to burn out, accidents, illness. Think of your life today. Stress? That's your middle name, right? Hurry here, hurry there, with never enough time in the day.

So, with all this stress and a culture that thrives on short takes, can we concentrate? Dr. Petty says that although no studies prove it, his gut feeling is that it's more difficult to concentrate these days.

*Story continued on next page...*

## Preparing Your Child For Sleep-Away Camp

When summer rolls around, many parents prepare to send their child to sleep-away camp. Before making a decision on a camp, though, you should consider what kind



of camping experience will benefit both your child and family. Jonathan A. Slater, M.D., associate professor of psychiatry at Columbia University in New York, offered this advice on how parents can prepare their child -- and themselves -- for this summertime adventure.

Ask plenty of questions: How does my child feel about going away? Has he or she handled previous sleep-away experiences well? What do other people who know my child outside the home -- teachers, mentors, coaches -- think about the idea? Understand that a child's age is less important than his or her emotional and temperamental makeup (although most camps have a minimum age of 10).

Make sure your child will enjoy the activities at the camp, which vary greatly and often focus on particular areas: competitive sports, nature studies, the arts.

Gather as much information as possible. For example, review camp videotapes, meet with camp directors and counselors, ask friends and neighbors how their children enjoyed camps you are considering, and,

if possible, visit the campsite itself. Once you've chosen a camp, write letters to the counselors describing your child's temperament and the activities he or she likes.

Monitor your own separation-anxiety level. Try not to make your anxiety too evident, because children tend to feed off their parents' fears. You can take some comfort in that you have fully researched and chosen what you consider to be the best camp. Once your child is away, avoid initiating contact; if need be, talk to the camp director or a counselor to see how your child is faring.

Many camps offer special services to children with just about any type of physical, medical, emotional or psychological disability or need. One question to ask is whether a camp that exclusively provides special services to children with special needs is preferable to a camp that has a more inclusive, mainstream setting.

this,' he says, "but we need to reduce the amount of time that people spend doing nothing but sitting in front of the TV."

- **Get enough sleep.** "You can't have a normal attention span and quality attention without good sleep," he says. The old saying about not burning the candle at both ends applies here.
- **Avoid too much stimulation.** Although caffeine or nicotine can give you a quick boost, that boost lasts for only a short time, and then you crash.
- **Pay attention to what you eat.** A high-fat meal can leave you feeling lethargic, and not because the body needs the extra blood to help digest the food. Research has shown that you feel sleepy after eating a meal high in fat or refined sugar because these foods change the composition of the amino acids entering the brain, Dr. Petty says.
- **Try to stay calm and relaxed.** "We all know that if you take exams, the more anxious you are, the worse your memory is," Dr. Petty says. He recommends taking a short break of a few seconds to a minute every hour or so at work to break the tension cycle. "Look up, rub your shoulders, breathe a little bit. That often works wonders," he says. Just taking a moment to breathe deeply and slowly helps you re-center yourself, he says.

*Krames Staywell*



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"One of the best ways is to look at the very high incidence of ADD [attention deficit disorder] in this country," he explains. "It doesn't exist anywhere else in the world at this level."

One contributing factor to difficulty in concentrating, he says, may be too much television. "We are bombarded by so many different stimuli that it's hard to concentrate on just one," he says. Some experts have pointed out that a child's attention span is now about 7 minutes -- because that's

the length of time a program runs before a commercial break. In Europe, Dr. Petty says, attention spans seem to be longer -- perhaps because there are longer gaps between commercials.

### **A Concentration Tune Up**

To help tune up your concentration skills, Dr. Petty offers several tips:

- **Cut back on the amount of television you watch, or your children watch.** "I don't want to say, 'Thou shalt not do