



Switching Off Tactics

SWITCHING TO *versus* SWITCHING OFF

When we're working and solving problems, we need to be *switched on* in order to focus and perform well. This is driven by our physiological arousal or 'adrenaline' system which keeps our levels of 'good stress' at an optimum for work.



However, we can't sustain this level of focus and tension over long periods without our health suffering, so we need to develop 'switching off' strategies we can use deliberately when we need them. If you try to switch off by trying NOT to think about something, you're likely to think about it more. For example, if you try desperately to NOT think about PINK ELEPHANTS, you'll end up thinking about them. Therefore, the best way to 'switch off' is to 'switch to' another activity (physical or mental). When the mind is switched to more enjoyable, relaxing and less demanding activities, the body follows by reducing tension.

STRATEGIES FOR SWITCHING OFF

Physical Energisers: eg

- Going to the gym or playing sport
- A vigorous walk
- Stretching
- Playing with the pets

Distracters and Relaxers: eg

- Listening to music
- Watching TV
- Reading
- A shower or bath
- An activity with family, children, friends etc
- Breathing and relaxation strategies
- Yoga, Tai Chi etc
- Visualisation techniques – pleasant scenes; daydreaming about your favorite holiday
- Mindfulness exercises

Reflectors and Releasers: eg

- Talk and debrief with a colleague
- Write down your thoughts and 'close the book'
- Deliberately tell yourself to switch off and focus on the activity you're doing now
- Pause any images of your work or the problem in your mind and make it 'fade' away. Put the sounds related to the images on 'mute'. It's like changing channels in your mind – you have the power to switch off the images and switch to your immediate environment
- Put the thinking on hold for later: tell yourself you don't have to think about it right now, you can come back to it tomorrow
- Focus back on the task at hand and your immediate senses (what you can hear, touch, see, smell etc)
- If your mind wanders – that's normal, just gently breathe, relax your body and bring your focus back to the immediate task

We can't switch off or get to sleep unless we can produce the following conditions:

- We relax the body and reduce any pent-up tension
- We deliberately let go of thoughts and images in our mind that involve work or problem solving
- We remove distractions and triggers which take us back to 'work' or problem-solving mode

A combination of strategies can help you get to sleep:

1. Use a relaxer strategy in the hour before bed
2. Use a breathing and relaxation strategy in bed
3. Tell yourself it's time for bed and that you don't need to solve any problems now
4. Pause thoughts and images of problems and worry like using a TV remote and let them go (fade/mute)
5. If your mind wanders just gently bring your focus back to relaxing your body (muscle by muscle), breathing deeply and the sensation of your body in the bed

If you wake up during the night, try to respond with gentle relaxation versus frustration – tell yourself to relax and that you'll get back to sleep; don't force it. Then use steps 3-5 above.

AUDIO EXERCISES

Mindfulness Exercise. Try this 10-minute mindfulness exercise to learn how to switch your attention to the present moment and 'switch off the mental chatter'.

URL: <http://www.tacticalcomposure.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/ME5c-Sitting-Mindfulness-10mins.mp3>

Switch off to Sleep. Try this 10-minute exercises (audio file) to help you switch off and fall asleep

URL: <http://www.tacticalcomposure.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Switching-Off-to-Sleep-2.m4a>

LETTING GO OF WORRY, MENTAL CHATTER OR INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS

1. When you notice the worry, thinking or memory – try to **respond with acceptance and relaxation** instead of frustration and tension by using the following strategies:
 - Talk to yourself in a calm manner –eg 'okay this is just a thought or memory; this is normal; relax and let it go; I don't need to think about this right now; I can focus on what I'm doing; I've already worked this all out, thinking about it more now won't help; I'm okay there's nothing dangerous',
 - Breathe and relax your body consciously (stretch or take a sip of water if this helps) by taking some deep breaths and making the major muscle groups of your body relax (e.g. arms, legs, face etc),
2. **Acknowledge the thought or mental image** of the worry and deliberately switch your thoughts to a pleasant scene or the task at hand – try some of the following:
 - Use your imagination to pause or 'mute' the mental image in your mind and make it disappear by thinking of an alternative scene (e.g. the beach or favourite movie),
 - Use your imagination to shrink the image down to only a small dot and let it go, OR
 - Bring your full awareness to what you're doing and what's happening in the moment (mindfulness).
3. **Re-focus on the task** you were doing – e.g. driving, talking, working, reading etc.

If you get distracted again then follow the same steps as above, and you may need to do this a few times over. You can also get professional help from a mental health professional or an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counsellor to develop strategies for switching off, getting to sleep and dealing with unwanted thoughts and worry.