

Is Attention Deficit really a Surplus?

Flow vs Flood

One of the defining characteristics of ADD is racing thoughts, distractability and an inability to concentrate on one thing at a time. However, describing this as an 'attention deficit' is somewhat misleading from a therapy viewpoint because these symptoms are actually indicative of a surplus or excess of attention – literally attending to multiple things all at the same time. If our attention was in deficit then we would not even be able to concentrate on one thing let alone multiple things.

Attention Surplus

The River in Flood



- Racing thoughts
- Distractability
- Jumping from one thing to another
- Over focused on multiple things at once

When our attention is in surplus (eg. doom scrolling), our minds are like a river in flood – water overflowing everywhere.

We need to let this excess attention drain away until we reach a normal level of flow.

Turn off the source of the water (our current stress response state) and allow the flow to ease.

The Sweet Spot

A Healthy Flow



A balanced level of attention allows us to focus on one thing at a time, be present and do our best work.

Attention Deficit

The Dry Riverbed



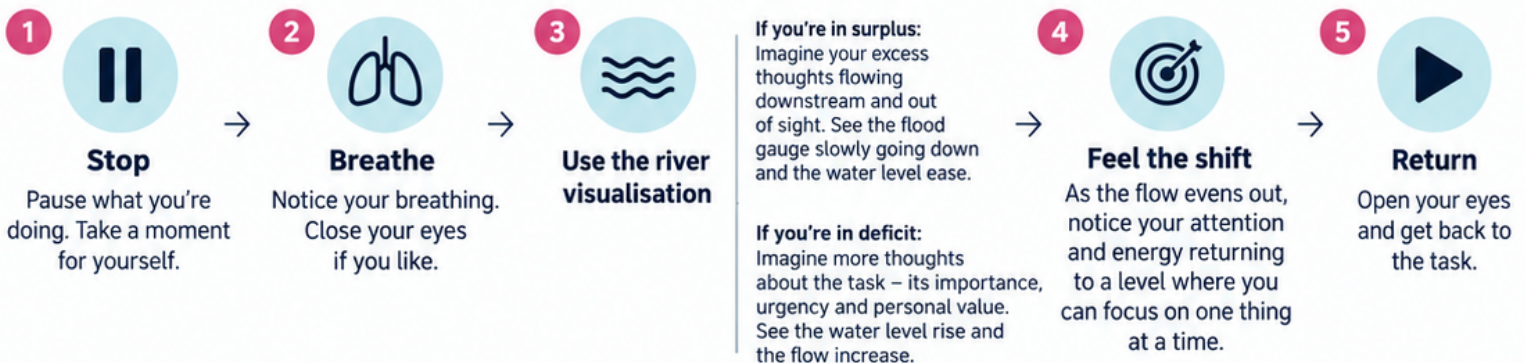
- Under focused
- Low energy
- Hard to get started
- Bored or unmotivated
- Not enough mental activation for the task

When our attention is in deficit we are under focused and the river is empty – there is simply not enough waterflow for the task at hand.

We need to turn on the flow of water (trigger a mild stress response) in order to fill it up.

The 60 Second Pause

A simple mindfulness practice to help bring your attention back into flow.



If after 60 seconds you need another minute or two to deepen the process, go for it – spending up to 5 minutes should be sufficient to notice a meaningful change.



If attention is still not where you need it to be...

- ✓ Don't spend any longer on it than that.
- ✓ Check in with your body for other causes of stress (eg. hunger, fatigue, ill health).
- ✓ Talk to your psychologist about other cognitive behavioural strategies that may also assist.



The good news

The most useful immediate thing we can do when we are in an attention deficit or surplus is the 60 second pause. With a little practice, we can learn to move from a state of 'over focused' or 'under focused' to a more balanced flow – and that helps us be calmer, clearer and more effective in the things that matter.