Take a Break!

You need and deserve a break today. In fact, experts agree we need breaks from work routines every day.

Regular breaks have been shown to reduce fatigue, increase productivity, and boost wellbeing. If you tend to work until you’re exhausted or bleary-eyed before stepping away from a project, or feel guilty doing so, try these tips for taking breaks to help you feel—and work—better.

**Go with the flow.** Instead of feeling frustrated when your computer freezes or your internet shuts down, switch your thinking on how you handle the unplanned downtime. Treat it as time to take an impromptu break instead of sitting and letting stress levels rise. Unplanned breaks can be more refreshing than planned ones—and lead to productivity gains of more than 12 percent—if you see them as opportunities to recharge, according to researchers at Harvard Business School and the University of North Carolina.

Frequent short breaks are more effective than occasional long ones, researchers have found, especially when they involve movement.

**Timing is everything.** Most people are more alert and energetic in the morning and notice energy slumps in the early to mid-afternoon. If you find that you still have a lot of energy when it’s time for your mid-morning break, taking a break then may not give you much of a boost. Try shifting your break to a little later in the morning. Remember to take your afternoon breaks, too. Researchers found that Danish schoolchildren had lower test scores in the afternoon than in the morning, according to a study published in 2016 in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*. But when students took a break to eat, play, and socialize before the afternoon test, they scored higher than those who took tests in the morning.

**Recharge with “microbursts” of activity.** Frequent short breaks are more effective than occasional long ones, researchers have found, especially when they involve movement. Five-minute walking breaks each hour have been shown to boost energy levels and sharpen focus. These spurts of what researchers call “microbursts of activity” also have other benefits, such as improved mood. If you don’t want to take a 5-minute walk, try a 5-minute workout routine. You might add a new fitness app to your phone so you’ll have a fresh supply of exercise ideas at your fingertips. Here are some to consider: Grokker, MyFitnessPal, Runtastic and Sworkit. You might also keep some hand weights or an exercise band in your desk for some quick reps.

**Find a break buddy.** Try to spend at least some of your breaks with a friend or co-worker. “Time alone can be replenishing, but research has found even more powerful effects when a break is spent with others,” the *Wall Street Journal* reported. In high-stress jobs, shared downtime has been shown to reduce physical strain and errors and even staff turnover.

Want to make the most of the breaks you need and deserve? Head outdoors for a quick walk with someone who lifts your spirits for both planned and unplanned breaks.

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