

Workplace Wellbeing

Using Brain Breaks to Support Mental Wellbeing



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Maintaining focus, completing projects, and maximizing productivity in an efficient way may all seem like common goals for today's worker. At times, these well intended goals can prevent workers from taking regular breaks throughout the day, both traditional "scheduled" breaks and short informal breaks. Research suggests the habit of skipping breaks and forcing oneself to plow through the day's work can not only lead to decreased productivity, but also lead to diminished physical and mental health in the long term. Taking short breaks, even just 5 minutes can provide benefits for both physical and mental health including, decreasing eye strain, easing muscle tension, and increasing blood and oxygen flow to the brain providing a boost in energy and increasing mental stamina.

You may be wondering if there are specific guidelines, recommendations, or activities for maximizing the benefits of breaks. The answer is yes, but they aren't hard. **Brain Breaks** are a great way to maximize the positive impacts of your valuable break time. A Brain Break can be described as an intentional activity that provides a pause from prolonged mental work which allows both your brain and body to recharge...going to the bathroom, grabbing coffee, and scrolling social media doesn't count, Keep reading to learn a few key factors to help you turn any break into a brain break as well as a great list of activities to try!

Turning any break into a Brain Break

- 1. Choose a favorite Activity:** Everyone has some favorite non-work related activities they enjoy. These often provide a boost for both mood and energy. Research suggests choosing these activities during breaks resulted in greater job satisfaction, decreased emotional distress, and fewer symptoms of fatigue (Hunter, E. M., & Wu, C. 2016).
- 2. Take breaks throughout your day:** It is our natural tendency to have more energy and focus at the beginning of our workday. This may lead you to believe breaks are more important in the second half of your work day. However, in order to maintain that energy and focus, it is best to have regular breaks even in the first half. When you push yourself hard in the first half, you are actually draining your energy resources that you will need later. By taking earlier breaks, you will have more balanced energy and cognitive focus for tasks and meetings at any time!
- 3. Breaks are time to unplug:** While scrolling social media or your favorite online shopping site may feel like checking out, these activities do not help recharge your energy or focus and they can actually cause further mental drain.



Activities for your next Brain Break:

Here are some ideas to get you started with enjoying the power of Brain Breaks, but allow yourself to be creative and explore what you like. This list is only a starting place.

Relaxation

- Listening to a guided meditation.
- Try a mindfulness app like Headspace, Calm, or Balance.
- Spend time journaling. You can find great daily prompts anywhere, or use the time to write about thoughts and emotions to clear your mind.
- Engage in a deep breathing exercise. This can be simple, close your eyes and take 10 deep slow breaths from your belly.
- Do some light stretching or self massage for areas of frequent tension.

Movement

- Go for a short walk, bonus if you can do this outside and get some fresh air and vitamin D!
- Do your favorite yoga poses, or try some new ones.
- Climb the stairs in your building, grab a friend to make it even more enjoyable.
- Jump on a small fitness trampoline/rebounder.
- Ride your bike to work? Take a quick ride around the block.
- Like Golf? Bring in a putter and ball and spend some time working on your game.

Get Inspired

- Turn on your favorite radio station or playlist and rock out!
- Start a sketch book and spend time drawing, painting, collaging, or even writing poetry.
- Read for fun, grab a good book or a favorite magazine and let yourself get engrossed (set a timer so you don't miss when it's time to get back to work).
- Get out the crayons, markers, or color pencils and color.
- Go outside and watch the clouds, what do you see?
- Brainstorm freely...about anything...draw pictures of your ideas, write them out, invite others to share.
- Tidy up your workspace, even move somethings around if you wish.
- Water your plants, maybe even other's plants, better yet, start a community garden in the workplace.

Connect with others

- Schedule breaks with a co-worker, spend time connecting, but also this helps you hold yourself accountable.
- Eat your lunch in the lunch room/break room or anywhere people are verses at your desk.
- Write a thank you note to someone either in your personal or professional life.
- Start a puzzle in the break room and invite everyone to help out on their breaks
- Plan a social video chat with a friend that doesn't live near you.

Have Fun

- Listen to your favorite comedian or comedy podcast.
- Play short board games card games or even tic-tac-toe with a co-worker.
- Remember hackysack? Dust off your favorite footbag from the 90's and start a new office trend.