



You Should Absolutely Take a Break Right Now – And Here’s the Best Way to Do it

Systems of Work

By Anika Nayak

Glued to your phone during a break?

Here is how to make the best use of your downtime at home

Working from home has become an integral part of the transformed professional lifestyle during this coronavirus pandemic. There is a lot of uncertainty about when it will be safe to go back to workplaces, as remote work policies continue. In these times of adjustment, it may be difficult to navigate around this way of life. Understand you are not alone and that you will get through this!

Whether you are a workaholic or just laid-back, it is important to stay energized and focused throughout the day in healthy ways. The key? It could be as simple as taking more breaks.

Why Take a Break?

With everything—work, life, and entertainment—being virtual, experts recommend stepping away from screens in order to achieve optimal wellness. *“Taking screen breaks throughout your day will help you get more done with greater ease and enjoyment and will also lower stress on your body and mind, which will benefit your overall health,”* says Krista-Lynn Landolfi, an expert transformation coach. While you may be tempted to doom-scroll and binge-watch, there are a multitude of ways to limit your time online and de-stress.

Along with those digital detoxes, try taking periodic breaks daily to focus on yourself. Work can be demanding sometimes, and if you are grinding away hour after hour, chances are this toil may be costing you more than productivity. *“Taking breaks allows your brain and body to get the necessary recharge it needs to keep going,”* says Brittany Johnson, a licensed mental health counsellor. Keeping up the grind may seem fruitful, but it can negatively impact your long-term performance and mental health.

A break can be really helpful to refocus your attention if you experience brain fog or feel absent-minded. Taking a moment to recharge alone gives you time to reflect on yourself and understand why you are feeling the way you are. This short pause can actually help reboot your brain to be more tuned in. *“It allows you time to come up with other ideas or solutions to [what] you are working on,”* says Brittany.

What Should You Do During a Break?

The options are endless, but you should try to engage in things that give you a sense of joy and comfort. Still, know that it may not be effective to take a break and get caught up in another monotonous task. Krista-Lynn, who works with clients of all ages from young professionals to celebrities, suggests infusing a sense of play in the day to lighten your mood and drive motivation. *“Next time you’re feeling a mid-afternoon slump, turn on some music, get up, and dance! Dancing is a great form of exercise that increases heart rate and oxygenates the brain, which will lift the fog and quickly refocus you,”* she says.

If you are feeling distraught or scatter-brained, spend your break engaging in mood-boosting activities. Brittany recommends increasing your mental sharpness for better memory, focus, understanding, and concentration. *“[Your] mental sharpness can [elevate] in many ways. Starting your morning with a short mindfulness exercise can give you the ability to install attention and focus,”* she says. *“I also recommend jigsaw puzzles or other games that require solving problems to increase mental sharpness.”*

When Should You Take a Break?

The timing of a break is not set in stone. Some days you may feel like you do not need any at all, and other days you may be eagerly looking forward to taking a break. In addition to meal and bathroom breaks, it is recommended that you take downtime based on how you feel. *“Take breaks when you need to nourish and nurture yourself,”* says Erin Coupe, a mindset consultant. *“A helpful practice is to ask yourself how you feel emotionally, mentally, physically each morning. If you wake up tired, angry, or stressed, you likely will need more breaks that day than other days. Look at your calendar and plan around your day.”*

You may be feeling cheerful in the morning, but your mood and energy levels can change throughout the day based on the circumstances. *“One of the best times to take a break is right before you’re about to reach an energy low point,”* says Emma Heilbronner, a certified health coach. *“Begin to observe your energy levels throughout the day; if you notice that you enter an energy slump pretty consistently, it is a signal that it’s time to get up and step away from the task at hand.”* If you are feeling low or demotivated, take a pause to reboot and refresh!

How Do You Take Control of Your Breaks?

How do you prevent that dance party from taking over your entire day? Distraction can be a strong possibility among younger people with developing minds who find themselves frequently diverting from their work. In its 2018 Workplace Distraction Report, Udemy found that 74 percent of millennial and Gen-Z workers report being distracted; of those, 46 percent say it makes them feel unmotivated, and 41 percent say it stresses them out. As school starts up back in the fall and virtual instruction resumes at home for most students, it may be difficult to balance the benefits of taking a break with the potential for distraction.

Some breaks can be more difficult to control than others, says Emma. *“If you want to take a social media break, there are tools you can download to your computer and phone that allow you to block sites [or applications] that are distracting for certain amounts of time.”*

However, there are other solutions for taking control of your breaks, according to experts. Julie Michelson, a functional medicine health coach, recommends using reminders and alarms to keep track of how long these breathers are. *“Decide ahead of time how many breaks you would like to take and how long they will be. This will help keep you on [schedule] and help you return to your work with increased energy and focus,”* she says. The key is to spread the concentration of work throughout the day. Set boundaries in your schedule for that much-needed self-care time: Your body and brain will thank you.