



ACTIVITY: Give yourself a BREAK!

Purpose

- Taking breaks throughout the day leads to greater productivity and creativity as well as many other health benefits.
- It can be difficult to find time to “step away” from work so planning for breaks during the day and having many different options to choose from can make it easier to incorporate breaks into your workday.
- This activity will help you think about breaks in a new way and help you discover the type of breaks that are most meaningful for you.

ESTIMATED TIME

10 minutes

MATERIALS

Required:

- A. Paper
- B. Pen

Background

- Most people don't want to take breaks. Why? Because, they are too busy. However, research has shown that taking breaks throughout the workday will make you happier, more focused, and more productive. In fact, breaks are essential to your health and well-being.
- **Breaks can prevent us from feeling bored.** Human brains were not built for extended periods of work and focus. Our brains have evolved to detect different changes to ensure our survival, so focusing on one thing for a long time is difficult. The solution, according to University of Illinois psychology professor, Alejandro Lleras, is to take brief breaks during long tasks to increase focus.
- **Breaks can help us retain information and make connections.** Our brains have two modes: the “focused mode,” which we use when we're doing things like learning something new, writing or working) and “diffuse mode,” which is our more relaxed, “daydreamy” mode when we're not thinking so hard. Studies have shown that the mind solves it's most difficult problems while daydreaming because the relaxation associated with daydreaming can allow the brain to hook up and return valuable insights.
- **Breaks help us reevaluate our goals** by allowing us to step back and make sure that we are accomplishing the right things in the right ways.



Activity

1. Ask participants to assess how often they take breaks during a typical work day.
2. Ask participants to note reasons why they may forgo taking breaks during the day. What are the barriers? Ask participants to share what they identified with a partner.
3. Ask participants to think about the times when they feel that they could get the most benefit from taking a break (i.e. certain times of the day when they notice energy lagging or types of situations that they find particularly stressful).
4. Ask participants to review the Self-Care Break Ideas and identify at least three examples that they would like to try during their next break.

Discussion Questions/ Key Points

- Have a group discussion about the barriers team members encounter when trying to take breaks. How can team members support each other?
- What are other break ideas the group has?
- How will the team incorporate breaks into the workday?

Let's Try This!

Share your break strategies with others!

Follow-up

Meet again and ask the group how successful they have been at incorporating breaks into their day. Talk about any benefits that team members have noticed as a result of taking breaks.

The Science of Taking Breaks at Work: How to Be More Productive By Changing the Way You Think About Downtime. Courtney Seiter. <https://open.buffer.com/science-taking-breaks-at-work/>

Schedule a 15-Minute Break Before You Burn Out. Ron Friedman – *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2014/08/schedule-a-15-minute-break-before-you-burn-out>

How Do Work Breaks Help Your Brain? 5 Surprising Answers. Meg Selig. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/changepower/201704/how-do-work-breaks-help-your-brain-5-surprising-answers>



Self-Care Break Ideas



Energizing:

- Desk stretches or yoga:
<https://www.doyouyoga.com/7-yoga-poses-you-can-do-at-your-work-desk-to-relieve-stress-68712/>
- Take a walk outside or around your building
- Make phone calls while walking outside or in a conference room
- Read or watch inspiring stories. These TED talks are a great place to start:
<https://www.themuse.com/advice/10-inspirational-ted-talks-perfect-for-anyone-having-a-rough-day>
- Change your environment – briefly leave your work environment and go to another area
- Take some deep breaths
- Meditate
- Go on a coffee or tea run

Brain-Boosting:

- Check out [Lumosity](#) for free online games to improve cognitive functions
- Grab some brain-boosting snacks like berries or nuts
- Read a non-work book for a few minutes
- Journal

Social:

- Grab some coffee/water or a quick walk with a co-worker
- Call a family member or friend
- Send a thank-you note
- Walk over to another department or area and spend time with colleagues you don't often see

Productivity:

- Organize the apps on your smart phone
- Do a 10-minute brainstorm on a project you are working on
- Clean up and organize your work space
- Clean up your email inbox

Relaxing:

- Do nothing for two minutes. Here's a timer to help:
<http://www.donothingfor2minutes.com/>
- Pick a new desktop background
- Treat yourself to a warm beverage that you love. Actually sit down and savor it.
- Go outside or if the weather is bad, check out National Geographic's photography archive:
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/>