

TAKE A BREAK

A Guide to Creating a Restorative Routine



**Student
Well-Being**
MCDONALD CENTER

BREAKS

This semester we are running a marathon, not a sprint. To keep up our strength and make it to the finish line, we need to pace ourselves and restore along the way.

Research suggests that a routine of micro-breaks, daily breaks, and weekly breaks not only help us to feel good, but they help us stay healthy, be more creative, and improve performance.

This guide provides examples of breaks that will help you be your best self and tips to start making them a part of your everyday life.

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BEST BREAKS

Research suggests that the most restorative breaks include these elements:

- Outdoors
- Nature
- Movement
- People - even if you are an introvert!

And exclude:

- Electronics
- Work

From:

When: The scientific secrets of perfect timing (2019) by Daniel Pink.

MICRO BREAKS

Even 2-3 minute breaks can be restorative

5 Senses

Pick one sense and pay attention to whatever you are experiencing for a couple of minutes. Break over!

20-20-20 Rule

Give your eyes a break from the computer screen every 20 minutes and focus on something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

Breathe

Just 2 minutes of focused breathing can calm the body and refocus the mind.

Gratitude

Write down something you are grateful for and why; send an thank you note to someone you appreciate.

Move

Stretch, walk, or dance to a favorite tune.

Prayer

Whisper a prayer of thanks, for strength, or help for yourself or someone else.

Values

Take a moment, especially when stressed, to think about who or what is important to you and why.

DAILY BREAKS

Do a few of these everyday for 30 minutes+
and don't skip them often

Exercise

Move your body in a way that feels good to you.

Lunch

Take time to refuel in the middle of the day and detach from work or class.

Meditate

Focus on one thing like the breath, an inspirational reading, or a meaningful conversation.

Nap

Take a "power" nap for 20 minutes or a siesta of around 90 minutes (no more or you won't feel good).

Play

Be silly, laugh, play a game, get creative.

Practice Faith

Connect with your faith or higher power.

Socialize

Spend time with people who you care about and who care about you.

SLEEP

7-9 hours daily

Environment

Create a dark, cool, and quiet sleep environment. Tip: an eye mask and ear plugs can help, especially when having roommates.

Routine

Develop a soothing bedtime routine that you can practice consistently. Try things like reading, praying, meditating, or practicing gratitude.

Schedule

Set a consistent sleep schedule - go to bed and wake up at the same times every day. Consider incorporating 20-minute power naps to refresh.

Screens & Caffeine

Leave a 4-6 hour buffer between caffeine and bedtime, and a 2-3 hour buffer between screens and bedtime.

WEEKLY BREAKS

4-24 hours once a week

Retreat

Take time to be alone, reflect, and journal.

Caring for Others

Look for opportunities to do good and help others by doing kind acts or volunteering.

Sabbath

Take a day off from all work every week and spend the day focusing on what is most important to you.



VACATION

Three or more days in a row a few times a year

Getaway

Taking a few days off to have a change of pace or scenery can make a big impact.

2-Weeks

Most people need a week to truly unwind. The second week is the most relaxing.

Connect

Make time to connect with people you value who you don't get see very often.

Novelty

Try something new whether it is a new food, location, or activity.

"Staycation"

You don't need to go away to take a relaxing break. Discover a new part of town, do a favorite activity at home everyday, or do nothing at all!

CREATING A RESTORATIVE ROUTINE

- 1.** Identify one new healthy activity that energizes or relaxes you. If you don't know, pay attention this week.
- 2.** Anchor the new activity to something you already do. This will help you remember to do it.
- 3.** Do the smallest, simplest PART of the new behavior. It should take a minute or less, and you should be able to say, "I can do that! No sweat!"
- 4.** Celebrate each time you do that part of the new activity. A simple, "Way to go!" will do. This creates positive emotion and reinforces the behavior.

In a few weeks of doing each of these steps (Anchor, Behavior, Celebrate), you will naturally add more parts of the behavior until you have developed a new habit that restores you.

Adapted from:

Tiny Habits: The small changes that change everything (2019) by B.J. Fogg.

RESOURCES

Want more?