

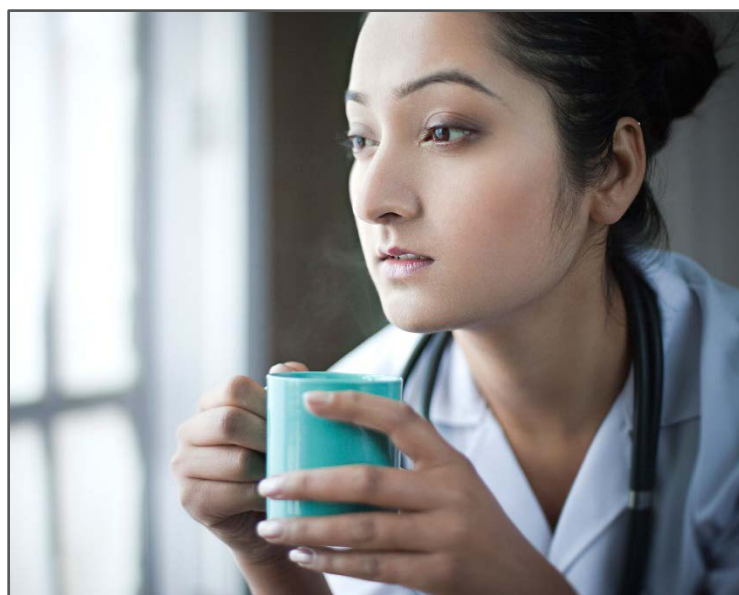
# EXPLORE WELLNESS

## Why taking breaks will make you more productive<sup>1</sup>

It is vital that you set boundaries to protect your time

*Harvey Schachter (2013) shares the article in The Globe and Mail, Why taking breaks will make you more productive*

Ann Gomez was frazzled on Monday, Remembrance Day, as she rushed through tasks and prepared for an 11 a.m. presentation. But before the Richmond Hill, Ont.-based productivity consultant began her talk, her group observed a preplanned moment of silence. As she paused, her mind released itself from the work that had been her focus all morning, and she relaxed and refreshed herself, allowing her to make her presentation in a better frame of mind.



"It was a wake-up call. It reminded me when I get caught up in the minutiae, I need to take time away for perspective and relief from stress," she said in an interview.

Micro-breaks may be more crucial than macro-breaks. We can't keep maximum productivity without them.

She shouldn't need a wake-up call, since she is a strong proponent of breaks, urging her clients to weave them into their schedules. She preaches about micro-breaks, like Monday's minute of silence, and longer, macro-breaks, like the one that you should be taking in five weeks' time for the end-of-year holidays.

Your micro-breaks don't have to come from setting aside time for 15-minute walks. They can come from variety, switching tasks, even attacking e-mail. Chatting with a colleague can be valuable, or having lunch – but she sees us increasingly abandoning lunch breaks, and the nutritional and psychic energy they provide. “Micro-breaks may be more crucial than macro-breaks. We can't keep maximum productivity without them,” she said.



To ensure they occur, she encourages her clients to plan them into the day. Set up a coffee chat with a colleague; mark time in your calendar for lunch. In her case, she gets a break when she helps her young children with homework or drives them to activities. Then, when they are in bed, she can return to work, refreshed.

She advises that it's vital that you set boundaries to protect your time, which starts with knowing what time off you need to be energetic and productive. “We're better at keeping meetings with others than keeping meetings with ourselves,” she said. When busy, we skip that solitary run or 5 p.m. yoga class but are less likely to remain at our desk if the commitment is to meet with a friend or work out with a personal trainer we are paying \$100 an hour.

We figure we need to stay at our desk until the work is done. “But these days, the work is never done,” she said. And research shows that productivity dwindles after 40 hours of work a week. So build in boundaries and breaks – in your calendar or to-do list – so that your mind isn't spinning with all the permutations of the day.

And make sure you build in regular macro-breaks. One of her clients, knowing they wouldn't happen unless scheduled, programs a break every three months. You may want to consider something like that in your own life, starting with the end of next month, when breaks are easier to take since so many people are off. On her blog, she lists 10 reasons a break will help you, including:



**You will return to work more productive.** One experiment found that forcing employees to take days, nights, or extended periods of time off actually increased productivity. And other studies show that brief periods of downtime, like afternoon naps, can restore focus and energy.

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**You'll catch up on your sleep.** Too many people brag about how little sleep they need to function, but it's the rare person who can consistently operate on less than seven hours of shut-eye. She works with busy people, but challenges them to cut other activities rather than sleep.

**You'll be more creative.** During downtime, the subconscious is still beavering away at our challenges, and can devise novel approaches. "In our jobs we have operational tasks and a need for big thinking. Stepping away from the day-to-day allows the capacity for big thinking," she said in the interview.

**You'll be healthier.** "From a lower risk of coronary heart disease to lower stress, there are many health benefits. The Framingham Heart Study found that women who took the fewest vacations proved to be twice as likely to get a heart attack as those who took the most," she writes.

**You will make better decisions.** Perspective provides clarity. In effect, that's what happened to Ms. Gomez on Remembrance Day. We approach our problems anew, fresher.

**You will have better relationships and work-life balance since you can devote the breaks to non-work activities.** You also can undertake volunteer work, and enjoy the pleasure of giving back. When you're not on a macro-break, she urges you to book in time with friends and family. Rituals like a post-dinner walk with the dog and some family members can be wise. "Don't leave your personal life to be a leftover," she said.

**You'll be a more valued employee.** She points in the blog to a 2006 Ernst & Young study that found that for each additional 10 hours of vacation that employees took, their performance reviews were 8 per cent higher the following year.

So remember her Remembrance Day wake-up call. As work gets more intense, build in micro-breaks, and don't feel compelled to work during the holidays – enjoy a refreshing pause.



<sup>1</sup> Schachter, H. (2013) *Why taking breaks will make you more productive*, The Globe and Mail. Retrieved from: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/career-advice/life-at-work/why-taking-breaks-will-make-you-more-productive/article15414653/>