

BREAKING FOR OFFICE WORKERS

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Why is breaking important?

It's simple: if you sit in any chair all day, no matter how well-designed it is, you are very likely to develop a headache, sore eyes and other aches and pains. It's important to break in order to:

- Avoid postural fatigue
- Avoid visual fatigue
- Refresh yourself mentally
- Improve productivity

Postural fatigue

Prolonged periods of static muscle work result in the accumulation of lactic acid within the muscle. This in turn leads to discomfort and ultimately, to muscle dysfunction and pain. So it's important not to allow the effects of fatigue to accumulate. Stretching and contraction of muscles help to prevent this.

Visual fatigue

It's important to prevent visual fatigue by changing your visual focus regularly.

Mental stimulation

Breaking allows you to refresh your cognitive function.

Improved productivity

The important message here is that it's in your employer's interests (within reason, of course) to break, so don't feel guilty.

What constitutes a break?

A break needn't involve leaving the building (although it has to be said that these are often the most effective types of breaks). If you simply can't get away from your desk then think about changing your posture or task. Visual breaks are easy at the desk. Follow the rule of 20s: every 20 minutes, look about 20ft away for about 20 seconds.

The best breaks involve contraction and

stretching of postural muscles. Going to the gym is a great way to break during the day. You can also do exercises at your desk.

Ideally, try to take a 2-3 minute break every 20 minutes. This won't always be feasible but it's a good goal to aim for.

How can I remember to break?

We all tend to get caught up in work, and before we know it, we've been at it for two or three hours. If you struggle to remember to break there are all sorts of ways to remind yourself:

- Design in breaks: move the printer away from your desk so that you have to get up to retrieve your documents
- Habits: drinking lots of water is healthy - and means you will need to leave your desk more often!
- Associative breaks: associate a break or change in posture with tasks that you do regularly: e.g. stand up when on the phone (if you don't need to use your PC)
- Set reminders on your PC calendar
- Use breaking software. This is specially designed software that reminds you to break in a number of different ways
- Task rotation: if you conduct a number of different tasks, break them up into shorter periods and alternate them

