

Economics of Taking a Brain Break



Brainomics® Bulletin

*According to the Slack Workforce Index of 10,000+ desk workers¹

50%

of desk workers rarely or never take breaks during the workday

13%

higher productivity

among employees who take breaks

43%

overall satisfaction



At Center for BrainHealth, one of the first strategies we give people for better brain performance is to take five-minute brain breaks throughout the day. A true brain break means pausing intake of new information – it's not chatting with coworkers or scrolling the news. Instead, it's about letting go of focused attention. What that looks like can take many forms: breathing, walking, gazing out a window, resting your head, or simply closing your eyes.

Short breaks allow the mind to wander, helping downregulate stress and recharge mental energy.² Many workers feel pressured by job demands and fear losing momentum, choosing to power through instead of take periodic breaks.³ However, neuroscience shows that being constantly locked in on work leads to fatigue, distraction and poorer decision-making.

Still, you might be thinking: "Five minutes of doing nothing? Multiple times each day? I have too much to get done." But what if we show you that brief breaks actually translate into economic benefit?

• Sustained performance:

Breaks reduce cognitive load, helping to prevent decision fatigue and mistakes. This translates to sustained output and less time and money spent correcting errors.

• Higher Innovation:

During periods of rest, the brain's Default Mode Network becomes more active, quietly working in the background. Even a five-minute incubation period increases innovative capacity, helping solve problems and generate new ideas.^{4, 5}

• Faster learning and upskilling:

Short intervals of rest boost memory consolidation.⁶ Breaks help individuals learn and retain new information more quickly, cutting costs of training (and retraining) and fueling bumps in creativity, helping employees do more with what they know.

• Reduced attrition and stronger workplace culture:

Employees who take breaks feel less drained and more autonomous. In turn, this lowers turnover and increases motivation, helping to build a healthier, more resilient work environment.

It may feel counterintuitive to take those five minutes for yourself, but it's clear that stopping work periodically to reset actually helps you do more. Think about breaks during physical exercise – you have to take short rests

to perform at your best and avoid fatigue. Why wouldn't you do the same for your brain?

Our reminder to leaders is to set an example: Take five, five-minute breaks every day.

By taking these breaks and encouraging your team to follow your lead, you are increasing productivity, long-term economic value, and trust within your workplace culture.

HIDDEN HEALTHCARE COSTS:

Taking pauses from strenuous work or constant screen time reduces muscle and eye strain – which, in turn, lowers absenteeism and presenteeism, both of which are expensive for organizations. If you primarily work on a computer, try the **20/20/20 rule: focus your eyes on something 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes.**⁷

Citations

¹Slack Workforce Index, Wave 11. (2023) The Surprising Connection Between After-Hours Work and Decreased Productivity. *The Slack Blog*.

²Center for BrainHealth. Breaks to Boost Innovation. *Know Brainers: Brain-Healthy Tips*.

³Phan V. & Beck J. (2023). Why Do People (Not) Take Breaks? An Investigation of Individuals' Reasons for Taking and for Not Taking Breaks at Work. *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

⁴Ritter S. & Dijksterhuis A. (2014). Creativity – the Unconscious Foundations of the Incubation Period. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*.

⁵Albulescu P, et al. (2022). "Give Me a Break!" A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis on the Efficacy of Micro-Breaks for Increasing Well-Being and Performance. *PLoS One*.

⁶Dewar M, et al. (2012). Brief Wakeful Resting Boosts New Memories Over the Long Term. *Psychological Science*.

⁷Whelan C. (2017). How Does the 20-20-20 Rule Prevent Eyestrain? *Healthline*.