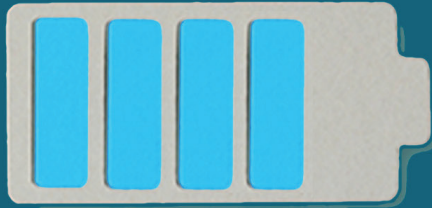




CENTER *for*
BRAINHEALTH®
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

ALLI BRAIN HEALTH GUIDE

Alliance for Living and
Learning Intentionally
with Brain Health



Managing
Mental
Energy

The Role of a Community Brain Health Coach

Rather than prescribing what students should do for their brain health, a coach (1) educates students with easy-to-understand science that explains why certain habits are brain-healthier than others, (2) provides a framework for students to make informed decisions about ways to improve their brain health, and (3) offers ongoing accountability and support to help students maintain progress and adapt brain health habits as needed.

Cognitive Overload and Mental Health

Burnout is not simply a result of "working too much" – it often stems from **prolonged cognitive demands** that exceed the brain's capacity to **efficiently process, prioritize and recover**. At its core, burnout reflects chronic mismatch between perceived demands and available cognitive resources. When incoming information exceeds the brain's ability to organize and manage it effectively, people can experience decision paralysis, reduced confidence, procrastination, mental fatigue and heightened sense of stress and anxiety. The good news is that a few simple strategies can help you recognize signs of cognitive overload and develop brain-healthy habits to help prevent burnout and sustain mental energy.

Pre-Intervention Survey

1. To what degree do you believe this statement:
"I have the power to improve my mental energy."

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Somewhat Agree
- c. No Opinion
- d. Somewhat Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

2. What do you hope to get out of this 4-week sleep course and coaching?

3. How often do you reach the end of your workday or school day and have no energy left for your personal life?

- a. All the time
- b. Often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Occasionally
- e. Never

4. How often are you engaged in multiple tasks and/or conversation simultaneously?

- a. All the time
- b. Often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Occasionally
- e. Never

5. How often do you tackle your to-do list in whatever order it appears?

- a. All the time
- b. Often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Occasionally
- e. Never

DID YOU KNOW?

A **Brain Break** is a purposeful pause from effortful thinking. If your brain was a cellphone, a brain break would be like putting your brain in “airplane mode” to charge faster – disconnecting from constant activity to help that battery level increase more quickly. Similarly, taking a few minutes to disengage your brain throughout the day helps you downregulate stress, recharge mental energy, and think more clearly and creatively. Pushing through the strain without brain breaks increases fatigue and distraction while reducing productivity – exactly the opposite of what you’re trying to achieve.

How to Take Brain Breaks? Try the 5x5 Method:
Take a 5-minute break X Do this 5 times per day

BB Count

HHH

- Disconnect from technology and people.
- Set a 5-minute timer.
- Let your mind wander and relax.

*Without breaks, your stress and attention systems stay switched “on” for too long. Over time, this **overload** makes it harder to turn “off” your brain when you want to focus deeply, transition tasks, or truly relax. That is why this practice is hard at first but gets easier the more you do it! Short brain breaks help lower stress, restore mental energy, and reset your brain’s reward system so you can stay motivated and feel a greater sense of accomplishment.*

What Is a True Brain Break?

- ~ Zero effort, not zero thought
- ~ Removing and avoiding inputs
- ~ Disconnecting from technology
- ~ Not directing your focus
- ~ Seeking peace and relaxation

What it is NOT...

- ~ Scrolling social media
- ~ Reading the news
- ~ Texting or talking to friends
- ~ Practicing guided meditation
- ~ Playing a mindless game

*Continuous external stimuli and mental effort elevate cortisol, **the stress hormone**. Heightened levels prevent the brain from operating efficiently, impair thinking and slow processes associated with neuroplasticity (the brain’s ability to learn and adapt). But there’s a solution – a quick mental break helps clear stress-related neurochemicals to improve your sense of well-being, focus and efficiently.*

When to Take Brain Breaks?

1. Being proactive – anticipate when you may need a boost in memory, innovation or brain energy to use in later activities.
2. Sensing a need – listen to your body when you feel stuck, overwhelmed, or exhausted.
3. Transitioning in your day – make brain breaks routine when you change to a new activity or place.

*During downtime, the brain’s **Default Mode Network (DMN)** becomes more active, helping organize what you’ve learned, connect ideas and strengthen memories. Taking a short break after a class, meeting or study session not only lowers stress but also creates the ideal conditions for memory consolidation and better recall later.*

WEEK 1

Reflection & Action



Is there a time in your day when you already take brain breaks without realizing it?

- _____
- _____
- _____



Which brain break benefits will be most impactful for you?

- _____
- _____



At what points in your daily routine will brain breaks help you most?

- _____
- _____
- _____



Identify 3-5 times in your schedule tomorrow when you will take a brain break. (*If a 5-minute break feels too long start with a 2-minute break and work up to 5 minutes when you're ready.)

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



**Recap with Coach
(Fill out next week)**

- _____
- _____
- _____

Conserve Energy with Single-Tasking

DID YOU KNOW?

So you, think you're good at multitasking? Think again. Whether you're answering texts during class, switching between homework and social media, or juggling multiple tabs, your brain isn't actually doing everything at once. It's rapidly switching between tasks – and that comes at a cost. When attention is divided, the brain's frontal lobes have to compete for limited mental resources. The result? More mistakes, slower work, higher stress, lower-quality learning and faster feelings of burn out. Over time, chronic multitasking can keep your brain in a constant state of distraction, reducing your ability to think deeply, solve complex problems, and adapt to new challenges.

The Solution: Single-Tasking

Single-Tasking means giving your full attention to **one task at a time**. Single-tasking helps you think more clearly, learn faster, remember more and experience less stress. Protecting your attention gives your brain the resources it needs to perform at its best.

Tools for Successful Single-Tasking:

Strategically choose your work location and conditions:

- Avoid places with lots of background noise or potential for interruptions.
- Clear away the clutter before you begin. Keep only the materials you need on your workspace.

Manage technology wisely:

- Close unnecessary tabs and apps.
- Turn off chats and notifications during your focus time.
- Remove temptations before you begin. For example, leave your cellphone in your bag and out of reach and change the settings to Do Not Disturb.

Plan ahead to protect your focus:

- Schedule times to check email and messages instead of constantly monitoring them.
- Finish one task before moving to the next.
- Respect your own focus time – and others' too.



Try this during your next study/work session

Write a tick mark each time you're distracted/interrupted

What distracted you most often?

Remember:

Your attention is one of your brain's most valuable resources. Every distraction has a cost. By choosing **single-tasking over multitasking**, you'll improve learning, reduce stress and get more done – with less mental effort.

WEEK 2

Reflection & Action



My habits that already support single-tasking:

- _____
- _____



New habits that will support single-tasking:

- _____
- _____



Anticipated barriers and ways to minimize or overcome them:

- _____
- _____



This week, single-task when completing the following tasks:

- _____
- _____



Successes or new insights from week one (brain breaks):

- _____
- _____



**Recap with Coach
(Fill out next week)**

- _____
- _____

Use Energy Wisely with the Power of Two

DID YOU KNOW?

Your mental energy isn't unlimited – it changes throughout the day. Tasks like studying, problem-solving, writing papers, making decisions and managing emotions all rely on your brain's prefrontal cortex.

After hours of focused thinking, mental fatigue sets in, making it harder to concentrate, make good decisions, and stick with challenging work. That's why **when** you do a task matters just as much as **how long** you spend on it. Have you ever been busy all day but still didn't finish the assignment that mattered most – or finally sat down to study only to realize your brain was already exhausted?

Instead of organizing your day with only **time management**, consider organizing it by **brainpower management** as well. One strategy to help you do this is the **Power of Two**.

What is the Power of Two?

Set aside **TWO** focused work blocks, of no more than **45 minutes each**, for tasks that help you get closer to completing a larger goal.

This is locked-in time for you to focus deeply on a topic or task that requires your full brainpower – and only 45 minutes, so be sure you are single-tasking!

Why Practice the Power of Two?

- 1. Avoid the Procrastination Trap:** When a task feels overwhelming, your brain can treat it like a threat, making you want to avoid it. Breaking big projects into **TWO focused 45-minute sessions** makes getting started easier and reduces stress.
- 2. Work During Your Prime Time:** Your brain has times of day when it has the most energy and focus. Use your prime time for high-brainpower work and save routine tasks for later.
Examples
High brainpower tasks: Studying, writing, problem-solving, exam prep, important decisions
Low brainpower tasks: Email, laundry, errands, organizing notes, routine chores
- 3. Make Progress on What Matters:** Protecting just **90 minutes each day** helps you move forward on long-term goals, not just react to assignments and emails.

Tools for Success:

- Take time each morning (or evening) to **strategically** plan out your next day. Write down when you will complete your Power of Two tasks.
- Break down your larger goals. Determine your *TWO 45-minute tasks* by considering steps that will move you toward a **larger goal** and which require the **most mental effort**.
- Don't let smaller tasks that are easy to check off take over your brain's **prime time** for deeper thinking.
- Remain **flexible**: it's okay if you can complete a task in shorter than 45 minutes, or if you need to try different times of day to find your prime time.

WEEK 3

Reflection & Action



**What is my prime time?
How am I currently using
that time?**

- _____
- _____



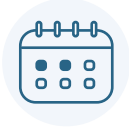
**What are some of my
high-brainpower AND
lower-brainpower tasks?**

- _____
- _____



**What is my current goal?
How can I make progress
toward this goal in a
45-minute time block?**

- _____
- _____



**Take Action: Open your
calendar or planner and
schedule Power of Two
work blocks for this week.**



**Did I schedule these focused
blocks during my prime time?**



**Successes / New Insights
from previous week
(Single-tasking)**

- _____
- _____



**Recap with Coach
(Fill out next week)**

- _____
- _____

WEEK 4

My Mental Energy Management Plan

Thinking back on what you've learned over the past few weeks, create your own Energy Management Plan. List out easy steps you can take to support reducing chronic stress, recharge mental energy, and making the most of your brain's prime time. You can include new habits you've started and want to continue.



How and when I will use Brain Breaks:

- _____
- _____
- _____



How and when I will use Single-Tasking:

- _____
- _____
- _____



How and when I will use the Power of Two:

- _____
- _____
- _____



Obstacles I expect to encounter and tips to help me minimize / overcome:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Coach Feedback

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Post-Intervention Survey

Effectiveness of Intervention:

1. To what degree do you believe this statement:
"I have the power to improve my mental energy."
- a. Strongly Agree

b. Somewhat Agree

c. No Opinion

d. Somewhat Disagree

e. Strongly Disagree
2. Which specific mental energy practices or strategies did you find most helpful? Why?
-
3. What specific improvements in productivity or wellbeing did you experience through this intervention?
-
4. What was of value to you during this training? (Select as many as apply.)
- a. Learning new habits to manage mental energy

b. Encouragement/support

c. Accountability/help me stay on track

d. Other (explain):
-

Impact on Daily Life:

5. Has the training improved your daily quality of life? If yes, in what ways?
-

Long-Term Sustainability:

6. Do you feel confident in your ability to continue applying the practices learned in this training on your own?
-

Tell us what you think!

Got 1 minute? Share your feedback and let us know what you enjoyed about the course. Your input matters and helps us make the experience even better!



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