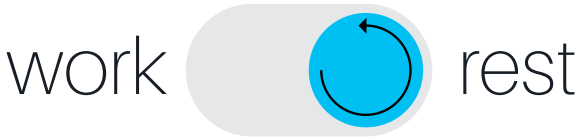
CENTER *for*
BRAINHEALTH®
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

7 Science-Backed, Guilt-Free Reasons to Take a **Brain Break**



What is a brain break?

A Brain Break is a purposeful pause from effortful thinking. Think of it like putting your brain in "Airplane mode" —disconnecting from constant mental activity to refresh and recharge.

Brain breaks help your brain to... *enhance focus & combat stress*

1. **Put your brain into "airplane mode" so it can recharge faster.** Like a phone charges more quickly in airplane mode, your brain resets more efficiently when you disconnect. Continuous input and effort elevate cortisol, the stress hormone, which prevents the brain from operating efficiently, impairs thinking, and slows neuroplasticity. A quick mental reset helps clear these stress chemicals to reduce stress, improve your sense of well-being and return to focus more efficiently.

2. **Get your brain off the hamster wheel by training it to take breaks.** Without breaks, your stress and attention systems stay switched "on" for too long. Over time, this overload can make it harder to turn "off" your brain when you want to focus deeply, disengage, or transition between tasks. Breaks retrain your neural systems to downshift when you need it.

3. **Take a moment to register progress and feel accomplished.** Chronic high levels of cortisol can decrease dopamine (our "feel-good" neurotransmitter), making it harder to feel motivated or accomplished even after working hard. Reset your reward system with a short break so achievements actually feel like achievements.

Boost Creativity and Innovation

4. **Step away to let your background brain do its best work.** Taking a break doesn't turn your brain off – the resting brain is still active. Downtime frees the *default mode network* (DMN) from external distractions and allows unconscious thinking to take over to connect ideas and make meaning of what you've taken in.

5. **Disengage to spark inspiration and "aha" moments.** Creativity occurs when the DMN's associative, meaning-making processes connects with the frontal lobe's goal-oriented thinking. Breaks allow these systems to interact, often resulting in "aha" moments and innovative solutions.

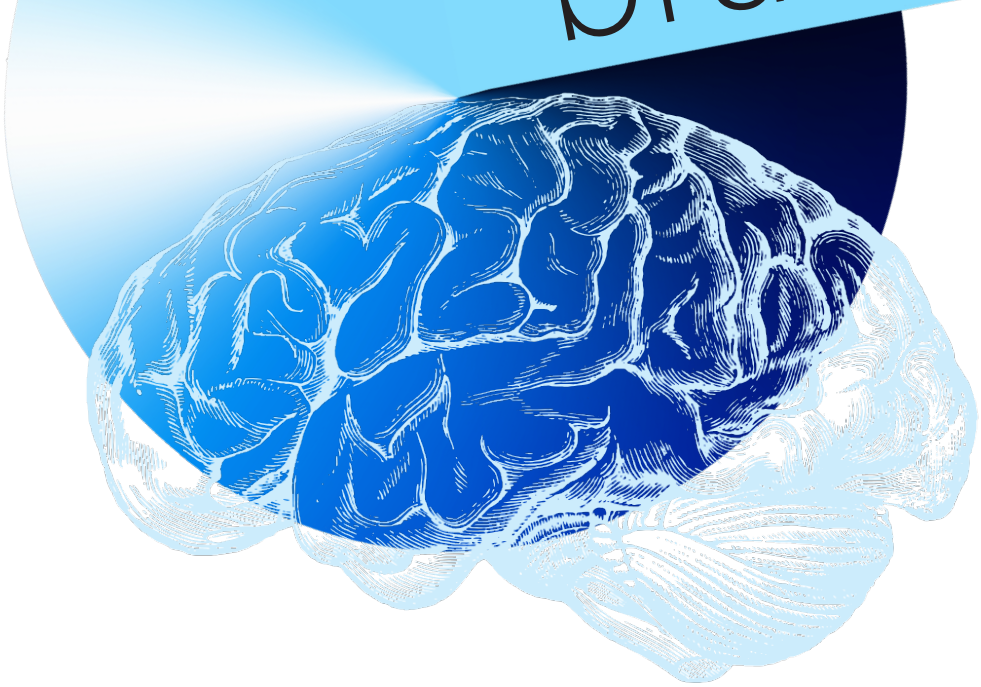
Enhance Memory

6. **Take a break now to remember more later.** Jumping from one task to the next increases cortisol, and buildup of cortisol can damage cells in the hippocampus, the brain's learning and memory center. A short break after a meeting or high-load task lowers cortisol which strengthens memory consolidation and later recall.

7. **Let your brain's librarian do its work.** The DMN plays a role in memory formation, especially when it comes to remembering personal experiences (episodic memory). Taking brain breaks allows the DMN to sort and integrate information, even though you're not actively reviewing anything.

Taking a few minutes to disengage throughout the day helps downregulate stress and recharge mental energy, allowing a boost in inspired, innovative thinking. Pushing through without breaks leads to fatigue, distraction and reduced productivity – the opposite of what you're trying to achieve.

How to take a brain break



Try the *5 by 5* Method

Take 5 minutes
—Disconnect from technology and people
—Set a 5 minute timer
—Let your mind wander and relax
Do this 5 times a day

MEDITATION	CHATTING
SLEEP	MUSIC

Remember that a true brain break is zero effort and disconnected from inputs. Although these activities are restful, they don't qualify as brain breaks.

A Few Ways to Incorporate **Brain Breaks** into Your Day

1. Drive without the radio on the last 5 minutes of your commute.
2. Schedule time between meetings where you're not looking at your emails or texts or engaging with people.
3. Take a walk around your workspace before and after tasks that require focused effort.
4. Go to the restroom without your phone.
5. When you're standing in line waiting, avoid pulling out your phone to scroll.

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