

# HOW TO TAKE A BREAK FROM WORK

(AND WHY YOU NEED IT)



Everyone needs to take a break sometimes and yet many people leave their vacation time unused. Whether you plan a vacation, a staycation, or a playcation, it's important to take a break from the job, the routine, and the demands of life in order to keep stress levels in check.

When you take a break, you're not shirking responsibility. You're taking care of yourself so you'll have the stamina to be your best. By learning how to watch for the signs that you need a break, you'll be able to schedule some time away that will help you feel more refreshed and restored.

## RISKS OF CHRONIC STRESS

The body is designed to respond to short bursts of stress. When stress is prolonged and the stress response is triggered repeatedly and regularly—as can happen in a stressful job or a conflict-ridden relationship—the situation turns into one of chronic stress, and real health problems can set in.

Chronic stress may make you more susceptible to conditions ranging from frequent headaches and gastrointestinal issues to high blood pressure, which brings an increased risk of heart disease and

stroke. When your “allostatic load,” or overall level of stress, accumulates to a certain level, stress can snowball because you're constantly in a state of reactivity.

At this point, even positive events can feel overwhelming if they take energy to enjoy. You're not able to respond from a place of strength and wisdom, but rather from a place of anxiety, or you work on auto-pilot.

## SIGNS THAT YOU NEED A BREAK

Sometimes, it's obvious that you need a vacation. In other cases, stress can sneak up on you. You may not necessarily recognize when you're at risk of being overwhelmed and burned out.

Everyone responds to stress in unique ways, which means that the signs of being overwhelmed are also highly individual. However, there are some general warning signs that apply in most cases.

In fact, unless you already feel energized, motivated, excited, creative, and fully engaged at work and in your relationships, you'd likely benefit from a vacation, because it's a good idea to manage stress before it feels overwhelming. Vacations, mental health days, and regular self-care can keep you functioning at your best.

"I think of these breaks as preventative care," says Rachel Goldman, PhD, FTOS, a licensed psychologist specializing in health and wellness. "We need to participate in them on a regular basis in order to be able to manage our stress and prevent burnout. The key is to prevent ourselves from getting to the point that we absolutely need the break."

It's important to note that many of these signs may also be symptoms of a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety. Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional if these symptoms persist even after you take a break.

## BENEFITS OF TAKING A BREAK

Vacations and even shorter breaks (take an afternoon off) where you get some physical and psychological space from the demands of life can bring many rewards. Some of the benefits you may enjoy when you take a break include:

- **Reduced stress:** Obviously, you feel less stress when you're not in a stressful environment. But taking breaks bring more than that. They interrupt the cycle of stress that can lead to being overwhelmed.
- **Rest:** By breaking out of the cycle of chronic stress, you can restore yourself physically and mentally to a healthier place.
- **Clearer thinking:** Because a chronically triggered stress response can lead to decreased creativity, memory problems, and other issues, this break in the stress cycle can lead to sharper thinking and increased creativity in all areas of your life.
- **Increased productivity:** All of this can make you better at your job, more available in your relationships, more energetic with your families, and more able to enjoy life after you return.

## WATCH FOR SIGNS!

If you're experiencing one or more of the following, start planning some downtime. This might mean a real vacation or even just a weekend staycation to recharge your batteries.

Key signs you need a break include:

- Changes in eating habits
- Cynicism about work
- Difficulty concentrating
- Getting sick more frequently
- Lack of energy
- Lack of motivation
- Low mood
- Frustration
- Feeling unfocused or fuzzy-headed
- Physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches
- Poor performance at work
- Sleep disturbances
- Using drugs or alcohol to cope with stress
- Withdrawing from friends, family, or co-workers