

Neuroscience tells us that, to be more productive and creative, we need to give our brains a break. It's the quiet mind that produces the best insights. But it's a challenge to take that sort of time off in the midst of a busy day. Here are three specific, quick and easy ways to build purposeful break time into your day.

### Quick meditation

New research from the UCLA Laboratory of Neuro Imaging suggests that people who meditate show more gray matter in certain regions of the brain, show stronger connections between brain regions and show less age-related brain atrophy. In other words, meditation might make your brain bigger, faster and "younger". As lead researcher Eileen Luders explains, "it appears to be a powerful mental exercise with the potential to change the physical structure of the brain."

Tip: If you commute via public transportation (or even if you're a passenger in a car pool) use the time to close your eyes for 10 minutes. If you drive, leave a little early, park and spend 10 minutes in the car before you walk into work. Choose a very specific image, such as a waterfall, beach or tree, and try to focus on it alone. If other thoughts get in the way, gently push them aside. Do this once or twice per day. The goal is to let your mind achieve a sense of relaxed awareness.

### Pulsing

Psychologist K. Anders Ericsson, renowned for his research and theories on expertise, points out that top performers in fields ranging from music to science to sports tend to work in approximately 90-minute cycles and then take a break. We are designed to pulse, to move between spending and renewing energy. Pulsing is the simplest, easiest, most immediate way

to build breaks into your day.

Tip: Download a "break-reminder" utility, such as Scirocco or Healthy Hints, and set it to ping you every 90 minutes. Focus hard on a particular task until that cue. And then take a walk, talk to a colleague, doodle or listen to music. Do anything that renews you and gives you a "second wind," even if you think you don't need it. You do. Five minutes later, get back to work.

### **Daydream walks**

Most people have heard the story about how 3M's Arthur Fry came up with the idea for the Post-it note: he was daydreaming in church. Jonathan Schooler, a researcher at UC Santa Barbara, has repeatedly shown that people like Fry who daydream and let their minds wander score higher on creativity tests. What separates this from meditation is that, instead of emptying your mind, you're letting it fill up with random thoughts. The trick is to remain aware enough to recognize a sudden insight when it comes.

Tip: Start by taking 20 minutes, two days a week during your lunch break to take a stroll and daydream. Think about anything you want besides work — a beach vacation, building your dream house, playing shortstop for the Yankees, whatever. Ramp it up to three or four days a week. The next time someone catches you daydreaming on the job and asks you why you're not working, tell them that in fact you're tapping into your creative brain.

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