Micro- Break Activities for Home and the Office

Micro-breaks are brief breaks taken throughout your day to benefit your physical and mental health. Physical movement and brief breaks from your work tasks help to: improve blood flow, decrease stiffness and muscle tension, decrease eyestrain, and improve memory, creativity, motivation, and decision-making. Micro-breaks can consist of relaxation techniques, general physical movements, recommended exercises provided by your Health Care Provider and brain activities unrelated to work tasks.

For every hour of work, take five minutes for micro-breaks. Consistent micro-breaks are even more imperative when working from home. Spontaneous breaks, such as co-workers stopping by our desk, walks to meetings, retrieving copies and going for coffee, no longer exist. Many employees are using screens for every aspect of their work tasks. For some, breaks now consist of disruptions from new co-workers (roommates, spouses, children and pets), however these do not qualify as true micro-breaks as these distractions typically increase stress levels and muscle tension. Socialization has decreased, daily physical activities have diminished and stress levels have increased; therefore we need to be even more vigilant about physical and mental micro-breaks. Following are some tips to include in your workday:

- Change your position to another location in your home (couch, kitchen, patio) during meetings that do not require typing; ensure your screen is raised to the proper height;
- Have walking meetings using your phone;
- Use pen and paper to complete brainstorming tasks and to-do-lists to help decrease screen time;
- Perform lower and upper extremity movements while engaging in meetings off screen;
- Use putty, stress balls, or squishy toys when not typing; and
- Use the EWI Works break timer for a micro-break reminder [https://break.ewiworks.com/](https://break.ewiworks.com/) or set an alarm/reminder on your phone.

While working from home form good habits to transfer to the office. We are not designed to be static.
When performing exercises use good posture, be aware of fatigue causing compensatory movements, and ensure the exercise or activity is congruent with your health and fitness level. If you have a health condition, contact your Health Care Provider prior to engaging in exercise. If your Health Care Provider has provided exercises for your condition, incorporate these into your day if appropriate for your work environment.

Proper technique is extremely important to help decrease risk of injury. If you are unsure, ask an exercise professional to ensure you are completing the activity with proper form. Maintain good posture throughout the movement.

EWI Works’ pictures above demonstrate proper spinal posture.

Example below: The first photo depicts a stretch that is too advanced for the participant’s flexibility. Good flexibility allows for the more advanced stretching position as shown in the second photo.
Incorporate some of the following movements and screen break activities into your workday. 
Note: activities listed in this document are for asymptomatic, healthy populations.
20/20/20 Micro-Break

Every 20 minutes look at an object 20 feet away for 20 seconds

Movement Breaks

- Back Arch
- Reach overhead
- Executive Stretch
Wall Angels – Postural exercise

**Starting position – side view**

Stand with your head, back and buttocks against a wall. Heels are away from the wall. Your hand should fit comfortably between the wall and the small of your back. If you cannot maintain this position, stop the exercise.

**Movement**

Movement (posterior view)

Thumbs point up, slide your arms up the wall while continuing to maintain your starting posture.

**End Position**

End Position (posterior view)

If you experience pain or discomfort with this exercise, discontinue and discuss your concerns with your health care provider for further guidance.
Following are some micro-break activity suggestions for home. Examples listed include functional activities and exercise progression. Consider your health and fitness level to determine the level of intensity and/or activity type. Remember to check with your Health Care Provider prior to engaging in new physical activities.

**Functional Activities and Exercises at Home**

#1. Get up from the floor
   a. Lay on floor, couch or bed, use your hands and furniture to help you stand up.
   b. Lay on floor, couch or bed use your hands to help you stand up.
   c. Lay on floor, couch or bed and stand up without using your hands.
   d. Increase repetitions as able.

#2. Walk with purpose
   a. Use good posture, take long strides, feel your muscles working for you.
   b. Start a walking program and gradually increase time and/or distance. Use your phone or a pedometer to track your progress.

**Functional Activities and Exercises at Home**

#3. Balance
   a. Stand on one leg and keep your balance.
   b. Stand on one leg, perform arm movements and keep your balance.
   c. Stand on one leg, perform leg movements and keep your balance.
   d. Stand on one leg, close your eyes and keep your balance.
   e. Hop on one leg, stop and keep your balance.

#4. Stand and sit tall
Correct your posture when in static positions. Feel your muscles working to hold you upright using good posture.
#5. Controlled sitting

a. Do not flop into your chair, control your movement to sit down. Practice and concentrate on sitting down properly. You may need to support yourself on the arm rests initially. Progress to sitting and standing without using the arm rests, while maintaining control of your movement.

b. Squats and lunges, using proper form, help to improve trunk and lower extremity function for daily activities.

#6. Controlled stair climbing and descending

Do not use your joints and joint structures to prevent yourself from falling down the stairs, instead have control of your body when you go up and down stairs. Start concentrating on your movements a few stairs at a time and then progress to additional stairs.

Muscular control helps to protect your joints. With practice you will eventually use muscular control automatically.

#7. Toothbrush posture

Keep your spine neutral and bend at your hips and knees when completing household tasks. Train your brain and body to use correct posture when brushing teeth, washing dishes, folding laundry, gardening, cleaning etc.
#8. Planks – Horizontal Posture
Keep spine neutral (you should be able to maintain a neck neutral posture, do not round your shoulders and upper back, do not sway your low back and keep your body and head parallel to the floor). Stay strong and once you start to lose form, take a rest prior to your next set.

- Start on knees and elbows
- Progress to toes
- Incorporate movements as depicted in the pictures

Remember to consider your health and fitness level to determine the level of intensity and/or activity type. If you have a health condition, contact your Health Care Provider prior to engaging in exercise.

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Proactive Ergonomics

- Take care of ourselves so we can help take care of others
- Practice sleep hygiene
- Exercise: stay active
- Health food choices (water, fresh foods)
- Work - Life Balance: set and communicate boundaries
- Workstation corrections: use proper posture
- Micro breaks: for your body which includes your brain; we are not designed to be static
- Early detection of signs/symptoms
- Do not be afraid to ask for help

For more information related to ergonomics, contact Staff Wellness.

Group ergonomic presentations are also available for departments.