

Filling Your Cup—Give me a Microbreak!

By Nirupama Madduri, MD, FAAP



Spring breaks land upon us in March and April, as we attempt to gather our families and visit a new or familiar place. Having a few days away from the office brings rest, relaxation, and the dread of returning to a stressful, high-paced office. During the work day, it can be very difficult to fit in a “break”. Bathroom breaks are difficult to include in the schedule and lunch breaks are often nonexistent. There is a wealth of information on the utility of “microbreaks” to reduce burnout and increase productivity in the work day.

Stanford Environmental Health and Safety defines *microbreaks* as “short, intentional 30-second to 10-minute taken during work to physically and mentally recharge, reducing strain and boosting productivity.” Benefits of microbreaks have been demonstrated in the literature. One group examined the utility of short pauses in the work day amongst 71 call-center workers. Each call-center worker completed two daily surveys for two weeks. Having short breaks to socialize or relax appeared have a positive impact, improving sales, particularly in employees with lower engagement. Snacks were not as impactful. Stanford notes improvements in physical and mental health, thus, improving overall well being.

Microbreaks take many forms, and it is important to choose what resonates best. Breathing for about 60 seconds can be very helpful. There is the 20/20/20 rule, which is defined by Stanford as taking 20 seconds to look at something 20 feet away every 20 minutes, which reduces eye strain. Taking a quick walk or stretching can be helpful, targeting neck, shoulders, and hips, where much of our tension and stress settles, subsequently causing pain and discomfort. Breathing is always a great way to take a

microbreak, and a 60-second interval of focusing on deep breaths may divert attention from stress and work. If there is an option for looking at a photo of a scene of nature, this will suffice.

Keeping our cups full needs to become a regular part of our day. When we take a moment for ourselves, we are better partners, parents, and pediatricians. We are more focused, efficient, and likely to enjoy our work. Although there are some suggestions, everyone can decide what is best for their wellness. In the words of the great Anne Lamott, “Almost everything will work again if you unplug it, even you.”