



# Rest and Relaxation

*“Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is relax”...*

It seems that in more recent times for many of us, being busy has become the rule rather than the exception. The nature of our work and life in general can mean that we are switched ‘on’ all the time, taking up valuable time and brain space and feeling stressed. Most jobs involve some degree of stress, and this can affect people at all levels within an organisation. Stress is a normal response to the demands of work and it can be beneficial in short bursts as it helps us to stay alert and perform at our best. However, prolonged or excessive job stress can take its toll on our bodies and it affects our psychological and emotional wellbeing.

Rest and relaxation are both crucial to countering stress and maintaining balance and wellness so that we can function and perform, and to cope. We often think of rest and relaxation as a luxury that takes away from productivity - something we do every now and then, the long-awaited holiday perhaps, or when we have extra time. Moments that can be few and far between! We need to actively manage our stress throughout each day — it shouldn’t require a week off from work!



## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REST AND RELAXATION

Research consistently shows that the brain cannot retain focus all day, it needs intermittent breaks throughout the day, and longer rest periods when we cease all work and physical activity. Rest is essential for regenerating our physical being and it largely occurs while we are asleep. Rest includes sleep and quiet times, when we don't have to be actively focused and engaged. Sleep helps to restore our body's energy. The optimum amount of sleep we need is generally 7 – 8 hours each night. Without quality sleep we tend to get moody and our capacity to focus and concentrate is compromised.

Relaxation is about regenerating our mind and giving ourselves a mental break. It occurs while we are awake and involves us engaging in activities that we enjoy and that boosts our energy. Research suggests that we should aim for a rest period about every 90 minutes or whenever we start to feel drained, when it's difficult to concentrate, or when we're stuck on a problem. These are sure signs that we need to do something active to boost our energy levels and top ourselves up.

The key to boost energy levels during a day at work is to find small ways to bring it into your daily routine and make it a habit like any other self-care routine.

## TIME TO BREATHE

Try taking a moment to breathe. Place your hand just beneath your navel so you can feel the gentle rise and fall of your belly as you breathe. Breathe in. Pause for a count of three. Breathe out. Pause for a count of three. Continue to breathe deeply for at least one minute, pausing for a count of three after each inhalation and exhalation.

## STAY CONNECTED WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Talk with a friend or colleague – debriefing releases the stress hormone oxytocin. Our relationships both at work and outside of work are incredibly important to wellbeing. Research shows that social connection is one of the greatest predictors of happiness and reduced stress. Research has found people who cope best with stress the best are those who increase their social investments during times of stress.

## EXERCISE

While exercise keeps our bodies healthy and fit, it is our body's natural anti-depressant. When we exercise our body releases endorphins which are 'feel good' hormones that help relieve stress and lift our mood. Regular exercise has numerous benefits – it has been shown to help relieve symptoms of depression and anxiety, reduce stress, improve sleep, boost self-esteem, and helps to manage chronic pain.

## DO AT LEAST ONE THING A DAY THAT BRINGS YOU JOY

Positive emotions contrast with low moods and negativity. Joy, laughter and play stimulate the release of feel good hormones and can play an important role in staving off stress. There are countless ways to access and experience joy. A few things to consider:

- Smile, indulge in some chocolate
- Listen to some uplifting music
- Make time for laughter and fun
- Hit the pause button and enjoy some peace and quiet - spend five minutes alone in peace
- Do a good deed — help someone else find joy

## TAKE TIME TO WIND DOWN

Make a point of allowing some time to wind down after work, before going to bed.

It can be helpful to set some good boundaries between our work and personal lives. Consider unplugging from work, setting aside time when you aren't engaging in screen time of any sort. We're not truly relaxing or present if we are browsing through social media or checking emails.

It is important to hit the stop button and reflect on the way we work, notice what makes us feel stressed and tired and know our limitations. There is no one size fits all approach to living and working well, consider trying some things out, work out what's best for you. With a few adjustments to our schedules and mindset, there are many ways to grab some relaxation boosters. Making room for some relaxation boosts throughout the day and allowing for rest and recovery at the end of the day can do wonders for managing stress recharge our ability to manage our work and personal lives, and considerably improves our chances for a more sustainable work-life balance, health and wellbeing.

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The Corporate Mental Health Alliance (CMHAA) is a group of Australian businesses dedicated to providing mentally healthy workplaces for their people.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT:

Website: [cmhaa.org.au](http://cmhaa.org.au)

LinkedIn: [Corporate Mental Health Alliance Australia](https://www.linkedin.com/company/corporate-mental-health-alliance-australia)



## Commonwealth Bank

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