

# THE MENTAL MUSINGS

The Psychological Research Newsletter

Do you think breaks are a waste of time? Do you feel guilty about taking one? Think again! Rest is just as important as work. Read on to find out more about the benefits of rest and how to take them meaningfully.

## WHAT IS REST?

Work and rest may seem like opposite concepts, especially during busy periods. Yet, taking breaks is an important part of work as they replenish physical and psychological resources used up during the day. Without rest, we start to feel sluggish, making it harder to stay focused. When taken effectively, rests boost motivation, increase work engagement and protect us from burnout.

In this article, we will introduce 3 types of meaningful rest—**microbreaks**, **psychological detachment** and **sleep**—and simple ways to incorporate them into our daily routine.

## MICROBREAKS

Let us start with microbreaks. Beyond our allocated lunch break, we take **short** and **spontaneous** microbreaks. Usually, we have the autonomy to decide when and how to take them.

Let's see how Yong Le uses microbreaks to ease the physical and mental strain he faces at work.

**Yong Le**



I was initially excited about my HQ posting because I could work at a desk in a comfortable environment. As I am getting older, I struggle with standing for extended periods and experience frequent leg pains. However, I realised that prolonged sitting at my desk made me restless and caused back and shoulder strain. I wonder how we can take effective breaks to prevent aches and improve my focus in the workplace.

### Microbreaks: Short Physical Exercises

Like Yong Le, you may experience similar aches and discomfort from sitting or standing for long.

Fortunately, short physical exercises, like stretching and walking, can prevent:

- Short-term neck, back and lower limb discomfort
- Long-term musculoskeletal disorders

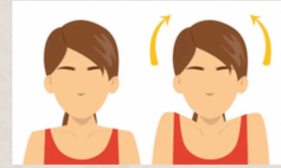
## Stretches

If you **work at a desk often**, try these stretches to prevent back and upper body pain!

1

### Shoulder Shrugs

1. Lift your shoulders to your ears
2. Hold this position for a few seconds
3. Let your shoulders down softly



2

### Overhead Reach Stretch

1. Lift an arm above your head
2. Reach to the opposite side
3. Hold for a few seconds
4. Repeat with the other arm

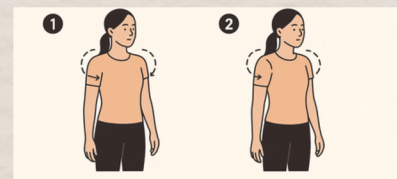


For **ground officers at commands**, these stretches help relieve muscular discomfort!

1

### Shoulder Rolls

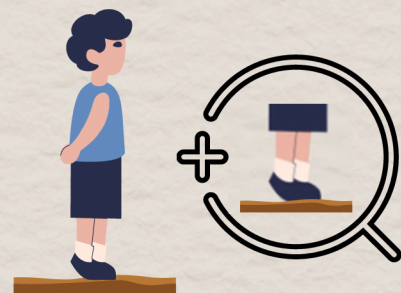
1. While standing, roll your shoulders backwards in a circular motion 10 times
2. Repeat step 1 by rolling your shoulder to the front



2

### Tip-Toe Stretch

1. While standing, ensure your legs are straight and your core is engaged
2. Tip-toe by lifting your heels as high as you can



## Walking

Besides stretches, short walks **reduce muscular pain** from prolonged sitting and standing, while providing **brief mental breaks**. Though they require more effort than stretches, they are still **easily incorporated into daily activities** like:

- Going to the washroom
- Grabbing snacks from the pantry
- Taking the stairs instead of the lift





## Microbreaks: Social Interactions

While many of us prefer working from home, it is largely a solitary experience. Working in the office with colleagues provides opportunities for casual chats at desks or in common areas like the pantry.

Personal and informal conversations, unlike work-focused discussions, provide **short mental breaks** and are **linked to positive emotions** at the end of the day.

Here are some tips to make informal conversations pleasant for everyone:

- Choose light and common topics everyone can participate in
- Listen attentively and ask questions to show interest
- Be open to others' views and respond with kindness and empathy

### Yong Le



While working at HQ, I stretch at my desk every hour to give my muscles a break. Sometimes, I invite a colleague for a walk to Mr Teh Tarik, so we can chat while staying active. I also encourage my Airport colleagues to take microbreaks by sharing stretches they can do at their posts and reminding them to catch up with their colleagues during off-peak periods!

## PSYCHOLOGICAL DETACHMENT

Psychological detachment, a powerful form of break, refers to **not thinking about work during non-work hours**. Disengaging from work mentally leads to many benefits including:

- Effective recovery during rest hours (e.g. improved sleep quality)
- Better overall work performance
- Lower risk of burnout

Despite these benefits, detaching from work can be challenging, especially during crunch periods. What are some ways to facilitate psychological detachment? You can try:

- Turning off work notifications and reminders
- Fully engaging in hobbies or exercise after work
- Practising mindfulness (e.g. Leaves on a Stream exercise)

Let's follow Amirah, a Customer Operations officer, as she demonstrates the Leaves on a Stream exercise.

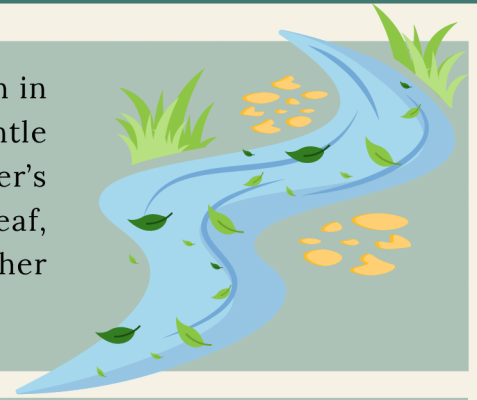
### Amirah



The Leaves of a Stream exercise helps us notice our thoughts without getting caught up in them. Instead of changing them, we simply let them pass, like leaves floating by.



First find a comfortable position. Take a slow breath in and let it out. Now, imagine yourself sitting by a gentle stream, watching the leaves drift along the water's surface. When a thought appears, place it on a leaf, and watch it float gently away. Do the same for other thoughts that might appear in your mind.



I find this exercise helpful after interacting with angry members of public. I take a quick break in the pantry to let go of any negative thoughts about those experiences. After the exercise, I am in a better headspace to continue my role as a front-facing officer.

Alternatively, you may scan the QR code on the right to watch a video guiding you through the exercise!



## SLEEP

Sleep is an essential part of our day, benefitting both physical and mental health. A good night's rest can:

- Increase concentration and motivation at work
- Promote a positive attitude towards work
- Enhance the benefits of microbreaks taken during the day

If you struggle with falling asleep, consider these strategies to improve sleep quality:

- Practising mindfulness before sleep (e.g. Leaves on a Stream exercise)
- Creating the right sleeping environment:
  - Dim and warmer lighting
  - No phone usage an hour before bed
  - Cooler room temperature (cooler rooms are usually easier to sleep in)
- Doing pilates, which can help through focused breathing and mind-body connection

## A CULTURE VALUING MEANINGFUL REST

Now that we have covered ways to build good break habits, how do we create a culture of meaningful breaks within ICA?

**Building meaningful habits** individually like stretching and walking may feel challenging at first. Start with small achievable goals—for example, take stretch breaks every 3 hours for a week, before increasing the frequency to once every hour.

**Leaders** are important drivers of organisational change. Consider **modelling effective breaks** during and outside work. Additionally, **giving staff the autonomy** to decide how and when to microbreaks can enhance their benefits.

Lastly, we can support meaningful rest by providing **dedicated spaces**, such as pantries or nap



Pods. These facilities make it easier for staff to take restorative breaks. Creating a culture of meaningful breaks takes time and consistency. When everyone plays a part, meaningful breaks are not just personal habits, they become an organisational culture supporting wellbeing and productivity.

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