

Sometimes, the overwhelming noises of life can quiet down a very important voice inside of you saying, 'I need a break.' A healthy mind is our anchor in life's storms. But our society romanticizes the idea of pushing through the pain. It tells us that our productivity, success, and ultimately our worth, depend on our refusal to stop. Eventually, it becomes all too easy to forget that our mental health should be the first priority, not the afterthought.

When Simone Biles stepped back from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics for her mental wellness, it wasn't just a moment of personal truth. It was a powerful declaration that sometimes, only by acknowledging your own limits and incapacities can you be brave, and only through simply pausing can you proceed again.

Understanding mental health breaks

A mental health break is basically a **conscious, temporary withdrawal from the routine and obligations of daily life** meant to restore your mental health. To grasp the weight of this break, it's important to contextualize '[mental health](#)' — a term we now seem to hear more often than not. But what does mental health truly imply?

Put simply, genuine mental health is that **state of well-being** where you are aware of your potential and able to incorporate it positively into your work and social relationships. It is a condition in which you can manage as well as adjust to uncertainties and challenges in life; while making positive contributions to yourself, the society, and those around you.

The true meaning of mental well-being is a testament to how a mental break is not a sign of weakness or a form of escapism. When you take a step back and find clarity in chaos, you are finding the strength to face the causes that might have propelled a need for this break in the first place.

Common triggers for needing a break

We are constantly and relentlessly pursuing something that matters to us, and this constant need to push can leave us with **mental exhaustion** and feeling disconnected from ourselves. To address the roots of the issues you may be struggling with, it's vital to understand the common stressors, or triggers as referred to by the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#).

Intense stress

Life is demanding and there's always something that commands our attention. If not work or meetings, then family responsibilities. And even when we're not doing anything in particular, our minds seem wired to plan for what's next. This constant cycle is draining and can raise our stress levels through the roof.

We shouldn't at any cost underestimate the **impact of mental distress on our psychological and physical health**. [New insights](#) revealed that chronic stress can have negative implications on our overall physical well-being, specifically cardiovascular health. Research also shows that chronic emotional stress can have an [essential role in the onset of mental health illnesses](#) like depression and anxiety disorders.

Burnout

A striking [40% of workers](#) experience burnout globally. Let it sink in: almost half of the world is suffering from a **state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion due to long and excessive stress**. Even though burnout has been witnessed for decades, this negative status has been recognized only recently as an [occupational phenomenon](#) by the World Health Organization.

While this does not constitute the classification of burnout as a medical condition, the recognition increases awareness about its possible negative impact on psychological and physical well-being and calls for a mental time-out when it sets in.

Mental health crisis

You are not alone. More than 1 in 5 U.S. adults experience [mental illness](#), and a mental health crisis, be it a nervous breakdown or a severe mental health disorder, is your body's way of telling you that something has gone haywire. So, be smart; listen and take action.

Major life events

Sometimes, life can hit us harder than we ever expected. A sudden tragedy like the loss of someone dear, or significant changes like moving or changing jobs can leave us shaken. In these times, give yourself permission to take a mental break — it's much needed to heal and recharge.

Benefits of taking a mental health break

Remember, taking a mental health break is not about taking time off. It's about investing in a self-loving act that can restore balance to your life. Let's gain some insights on what mental breaks can change in your life.

Improve your mental clarity

If you believe that a break can make you fall behind, acknowledge the research that shows how [mental fatigue can impact your nervous system](#) and lead to impaired cognitive performance. Your mind needs to rest similar to how a battery needs recharging.

Taking a break can help clear the fog from your head and allow you to think more clearly about what you are doing, so that you may make better decisions.

Reduce stress

Life's stresses are endless, and taking some time away allows your body and mind to rest. Relieving stress levels provides the opportunity for you to return to life refreshed with newfound mental resilience that can help in facing whatever comes your way.

Enhance productivity

You will feel re-energized and much more driven after taking some time off for your mental health. This renewed energy translates into better performance and higher productivity.

Research suggests that even '[micro breaks](#)', or short breaks of no longer than 10 minutes throughout the working day can have a drastic impact. A few minutes can seem trivial, but they can actually reduce fatigue, improve vigor, and enhance your overall performance.

Strengthen your relationships

When you relieve stress and feel balanced and whole, you're able to connect better with those around. The mental resilience you gain when you take a break allows you to even deal with conflict in a healthier manner.

Transform your physical health

We now have a [proven understanding](#) of the toll mental distress can have on our bodies. It's a common mistake to think of mind and body as separate, and taking a mental health break can alleviate many physical symptoms that are getting in the way of having your most ideal life.

Love yourself

Not only is taking a mental break an act of self-love in itself, but taking breaks when you're feeling overwhelmed and stepping away from a stressful situation, signals to your mind that you are worthy and deserving of looking after yourself, that you are a priority too. This reminder will boost your self-image and perception and allow you to perform other self-loving acts in your everyday life.

Lessons from Simone Biles

Imagine being at the peak of your career, competing at the most important event. You trained for it for your entire life. Now see yourself **having the courage to walk away from it all because you need to put yourself first**. That's exactly what Simon Biles did.

Indeed, the most decorated American Olympic gymnast did leave so many in shock when she pulled out from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. She had suffered a gymnastics world-known phenomenon called 'twisties.' Basically, gymnasts in mid-air can experience a mental block and lose the connection between mind and body that essentially allows them to land safely. Knowing the danger she could put herself in, Simone wisely decided not to complete the rest of the competition.

The impact of her break on her performance

["It's paid off!"](#) Simone's perseverance and commitment to prioritize her mental health have indeed paid off. Simon Biles' mental health is dominating the headlines. Why now? Back stronger than ever, Biles has won 3 Gold medals and 1 Silver medal at the Paris 2024 Olympics and has even made Olympic history.

Simone is now seen as a mental health advocate, and has potentially **destigmatized mental health issues** for millions around the world. Being on the enormous platform of the Olympics, Biles spoke volumes with her act. She showed that even the most successful and the strongest of us can feel overwhelmed and can ask for help.

The public could not help but applaud her for her astounding return, and her astonishing bravery.

How athletes' breaks influence public perception

In a world where anyone can be seen and heard, it's important to acknowledge the influence athletes can have on sports enthusiasts and all those around them. When having an influential voice that is far-reaching, using it for **promoting mental health breaks can have an unparalleled positive impact**.

Athletes across the globe are increasingly doing so, having their voices echo for change and awareness. Carlos Alcaraz, being a tennis revelation at such a young age, speaks openly about his mental health training that helps him remain resilient in the face of pressure.

How to take an effective mental health break

It's not easy admitting to yourself or others that you need to hit pause. But in accepting your need to reduce stress, you've already made the first step. Now remains the how and what.

Recognizing when you need a break

The first step in any [effective mental health break](#) is listening to what your mind and body are telling you. They're constantly sending you signals, and the identification of them can be where your healing begins:

- Feeling overwhelmed with no reprieve
- Difficulty concentrating no matter how much you try
- Increased irritability or angry outbursts
- Physical symptoms like persistent headaches, upset stomach, or tight muscles
- Frequent illness as stress can weaken the immune system
- Change in [eating habits](#) or skipping meals
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Loss of interest in things you once loved
- Poor hygiene contrary to normal

Planning your break

Allowing yourself to take a break is an expression of self-love. These are some tips on how to ensure that your time away from work will be truly rehabilitative.

1. **Acknowledge the need.** Know it's okay to step back. Your well-being matters the most.
2. **Communicate.** Tell your employer, family, or close friends you need this time to heal. Of course, it's best if you have the ability to plan your time off well in advance. But if you wake up and really just can't make an explanation as to why you need the

- day off, you aren't required to. If you really have to, just take a sick day off, or feel free to be open about it if you have a really supportive work environment.
3. **Secure support.** Be sure that you have support lined up, be it a therapist, friend, or family member.
 4. **Prepare for finances.** If your break is unpaid, make sure you have the means of meeting your needs during this period.

Activities to engage in during your break

You are the best judge to determine how you should spend your mental health break. Each of us is unique, and what works for some can be useless for others. Nonetheless, there are tried-and-tested techniques that are known to be generally beneficial for mental wellness. It's also helpful to consider the length of your break, whether you're taking a quick break off or a longer break sets the activities that you can carry out.

Consider reconnecting with [relaxing activities](#) you enjoy, be it drawing, music, reading, or whatever it is that brings you satisfaction and joy. Think about integrating **bursts of workouts** throughout your mental health day. [Research](#) has shown that these can have a profound impact on distressing, and [regular exercise](#) works wonders for your overall physical health.

If it's within your capabilities and your life allows for it, you might as well take a longer vacation. Daily grind will always be a constant, and self-care should not fall too much behind.

Tips on returning to work or daily routine

1. **Ease back in** and don't rush into a full workload. Give yourself time to adjust.
2. **Break tasks** into small, achievable steps, and prioritize what's truly important.
3. **Maintain** the self-care habits you developed during your break as a regular part of your routine.
4. **Be honest** with your employer or colleagues about any adjustments you might need.
5. **Regularly check in** with yourself, and don't forget to admit when you need another break.

Resources and support for mental health

Don't neglect the most important part of your journey — yourself. While a mental break is one of the healthy ways you can support yourself, mental health needs consistent effort, and at times, you may need additional external help.

Professional help and therapy

If your symptoms are persistent and worsening, they could point to an underlying mental health condition, including depressive disorders and anxiety. Your mental health should not be an item on your to-do list. It's wise to act now and consult a mental health professional.

Find a licensed therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist specializing in your specific concern. If finding a healthcare professional yourself seems overwhelming, ask your primary care physician for a referral to a mental health specialist.

Websites such as [Psychology Today](#) and [TherapyRoute](#) help locate qualified professionals around your area.

Schedule an initial consultation and set a treatment plan with your chosen professional. Talk therapy, or **cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**, guides you through lifestyle changes that can deeply transform your perception and drastically improve your life.

Online resources and communities

As Simone Biles advised, use the resources at your disposal. This is a time and age where, even more than ever, you are not alone in your struggles. You can connect with stories similar to yours, and have access to resources that could make a genuine difference in your life.

1. [Crisis Text Line](#) is a text support service for people in crisis. (Text HOME to 741741 in the U.S., www.crisistextline.org).
2. [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#) offers education on mental health conditions, support resources, and mental health advocacy.
3. [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) provides 24/7 support for those in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. (U.S.: 1-800-273-8255)
4. [Mental Health Foundation](#) offers resources, research, and advice to improve your mental well-being.
5. [Mental health apps](#) like Headspace, Calm and Open are guided meditation apps that have been testified to by millions for their de-stressing impacts, and perhaps they can do the same for you.

[Suicide ranks among the leading causes of death](#) in the United States. By being aware of such information and passing it to others, you could be saving someone's life.

Life can be relentless, but your wellness is worth the pause. When your inner self whispers, 'take a break,' it's time to listen. Those moments of breaks are not symptoms of weakness. Rather, these are acts of deep self-care. They reinvigorate our spirits and let us find the actual strength lying within ourselves. Let's treat our mental well-being with compassion, for it makes us resilient, joyful, and truly thriving.

FAQ

What is World Mental Health Day?

World Mental Health Day is an international day annually observed on 10 October to raise awareness and support about mental health issues. The primary objective of WFMH has been to nudge every stakeholder towards promoting mental well-being, reducing stigma, and encouraging open conversations about mental health.

How to support friends and family in taking their own mental breaks?

Encourage open communication with your loved ones, normalize mental breaks, help them plan, offer support, suggest self-care activities, and check in regularly. Remember, you can lead

by example and share your own experience. When you take a break yourself, they're more likely to be encouraged to do the same.

Can my employer deny me a mental health break?

While employers do have grounds to reject some leave of absence requests, they still must abide by employment laws. If your break is covered by a doctor's note or would come under the ambit of medical leave policies (FMLA in the U.S.), an employer usually has to grant this leave.

Key takeaways

- Allowing yourself a mental health break is an embrace of your own humanity. Recharge, heal your mind, and step back into life with a refreshed perspective and renewed hope.
- Recognizing common triggers like stress and burnout is imperative. These unseen burdens can have profound negative implications on your well-being, and awareness of them is the first step toward healing.
- The self-loving act of taking a mental health break can be truly transformative. A break can clear your mind, reduces overwhelming stress, reignite your productivity, and strengthen your relationships.
- You are never alone. Countless resources and supportive communities are available to help you. Reaching out for support is a courageous step for your long-term healing and resilience.

Resources:

1. [Mental health.](#)
2. [Understanding mental illness triggers.](#)
3. [The effects of chronic stress on health: New insights into the molecular mechanisms of brain–body communication.](#)
4. [The key role of the amygdala in stress. The amygdala - where emotions shape perception, learning and memories.](#)
5. [Mental illness.](#)
6. [Neural mechanisms of mental fatigue revisited: new insights from the Brainconnectome.](#)
7. [“Give me a break!” a systematic review and metaanalysis on the efficacy of micro-breaks for increasing well-being and performance.](#)

8. [The impact of stress on body function: a review.](#)
9. [Neurohormonal regulation of appetite and its relationship with stress: a mini literature review.](#)
10. [Natural resistance: exposure to nature and self-regulation, mood, and physiology after ego-depletion.](#)
11. [The contribution of various types of activities to recovery.](#)
12. [Short bouts of intensive exercise during the workday have a positive effect on neuro-cognitive performance.](#)