

Healthy breaks for healthy meetings

Just 10 minutes of exercise a day can improve a person's mood, energy level, and focus.* Energize your employees by scheduling a 5- to 15-minute healthy break when meetings last longer than one hour. Depending on the length of your meeting, you have three revitalizing options:

1

Stretch breaks

2

Active breaks

3

Moving meetings

What is a healthy break?

- It's a quick 5- to 15-minute exercise to energize employees and help enhance their mood
- You or any enthusiastic wellness supporter on your team can successfully lead a break without any professional experience—no physical trainer required
- While you don't need a lot of space, make sure there's enough for everyone to move around comfortably

Remind employees

- Participation is completely voluntary
- Movement should be comfortable and at your own pace
- If anything hurts, please stop immediately
- You'll increase your energy and feel more relaxed—without sweat or pain

1 Stretch breaks

Chair stretches

Many chair stretches are based on yoga poses. Remind employees to sit tall and breathe deeply while they do these stretches—more oxygen in the blood will boost energy levels.

<input type="radio"/>	Turn your head to the left and hold for 5–10 seconds. Then turn your head to the right and repeat.
<input type="radio"/>	Inhale and shrug your shoulders upward, squeezing them tightly. Exhale and relax as you slide your shoulder blades down your back. Repeat five times.
<input type="radio"/>	Take a deep breath as you lift both arms from the side up toward the ceiling, ending with palms together. Breathe out as you bring your arms back down to the side, circling back to bring your palms together in the middle of your chest.
<input type="radio"/>	Stretch your left arm across your chest, holding your forearm with your right hand. Hold the stretch for 5–10 seconds, then switch arms.
<input type="radio"/>	Lift your left arm straight up and bend it at the elbow so your hand touches your shoulder blade. Place your right hand against the back of your left elbow and gently apply pressure. Hold for approximately 10–15 seconds, then switch sides.

continues

① Stretch breaks (continued)

<input type="radio"/>	Sitting on the edge of your chair, interlace your fingers behind you at your lower back. Pull your shoulder blades together as you straighten your arms.
<input type="radio"/>	Take both your arms and interlace your fingers behind your neck, being careful not to pull on your neck. Pull your elbows backward. Hold for 10–15 seconds.
<input type="radio"/>	Put your left hand on your right knee and gently twist your upper body to the right. Extend your right arm backward if possible, keeping it horizontal to the floor, with your palm down. Switch.
<input type="radio"/>	Sit with your feet flat and your hands on the sides of your chair. Inhale as you lift your left leg straight in front of you and flex your foot. Exhale as you lower your leg to the floor. Switch.

Standing stretches

Employees may spend most of their day sitting, so standing stretches can help them boost the blood flow throughout their body.

<input type="radio"/>	Lift both arms out to your sides, then up to the ceiling, palms together if possible.
<input type="radio"/>	Interlace your fingers with your arms stretched out in front of you and bring to shoulder height, palms facing out. Roll your back and shoulders forward, then straighten back up.
<input type="radio"/>	Interlace your fingers behind your lower back to stretch your shoulders. Lift your arms if you can.
<input type="radio"/>	Standing tall, tilt slightly forward at the waist, then tilt to the left, back, and right sides.
<input type="radio"/>	Lift your left arm to the ceiling and lean slightly to your right, lengthening your spine as you bend. Switch.
<input type="radio"/>	With your hands on your waist, gently twist your upper body and look first over your left shoulder, then your right.
<input type="radio"/>	Stand with one leg approximately one foot in front of the other. Bend your front knee and lean slightly forward to get a light calf stretch, keeping your back leg straight. Switch.
<input type="radio"/>	Stand tall with feet together. Lift your left leg straight out in front of you, approximately six inches off the ground. Hold for 15–20 seconds. Switch.
<input type="radio"/>	Stand tall with feet together. Lift your left leg off the floor and rotate the foot clockwise 10 times, then counterclockwise. Switch.

② Active breaks

For meetings that are longer than one hour, make sure you include a 5- to 15-minute active break—giving employees a chance to stretch their legs and maybe even climb some stairs.

<input type="radio"/>	Take a quick 5- or 10-minute walk around the building. Getting outside for some fresh air will help refresh and energize you for the rest of your meeting.
<input type="radio"/>	If there's no time to leave the building, take a quick walk through the halls. Try using a bathroom on a different floor so you can walk a few flights of stairs.
<input type="radio"/>	Announce a competition for the employee who climbs the most stairs—or who walks the highest number of steps—during the break. You can even hand out pedometers to all meeting participants to encourage them to move.

③ Moving meetings

Some meetings are better held on the go.

<input type="radio"/>	Design a simple walking route for one-on-one meetings.
<input type="radio"/>	Reserve a conference space in another building across campus to encourage employees to walk.
<input type="radio"/>	If employees don't want to walk, encourage them to stand for shorter meetings. They'll be burning more calories than if they were sitting—and yet won't have to wear their track shoes.
<input type="radio"/>	Encourage larger groups to get creative—breaking the participants out into groups of two and three to walk around the campus together. The group can meet up at planned stops and either switch partners or reconvene.

* Jodi Helmer, "Instant Energy Boosters," ArthritisToday.com, accessed on August 26, 2010.