

Employees tend to avoid taking breaks despite high levels of stress

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Heavy workloads make employees feel a greater need for a break, but new research finds they may actually discourage employees from taking breaks at work despite causing high levels of stress, fatigue, and poor

performance.

Researchers from the University of Waterloo found employees often kept working despite wanting to pause. One potential reason is employees may have felt pressure to continue working to get everything done on time.

"Our [research](#) provides a comprehensive account of the processes involved in the decision to take a break and provides insights into how employees and managers can make more effective use of breaks at work, potentially improving both well-being and performance," said James Beck, professor of industrial and [organizational psychology](#) at Waterloo.

To conduct the study, researchers asked 107 employees about their reasons for taking a break and not taking one. They then surveyed another 287 employees twice daily over five days about their sleep quality, fatigue, performance concerns, workload, and the number of breaks they take each day.

The researchers also found that although previous research has shown that breaks can benefit [employee](#) well-being and performance, they may resist taking breaks if they feel supervisors discourage breaks in their workplace. Although there may be a misconception that breaks are unproductive, Phan notes that many employees take breaks because they are committed to staying focused and maintaining high levels of performance.

"We recognize that it may not always be possible for [employees](#) to take more breaks, but if employers can promote employee well-being by addressing the conditions that can make work unpleasant, they may be able to reduce the number of breaks needed," said Dr. Vincent Phan, first author of the study, which he led as part of his doctoral thesis in

industrial and organizational psychology at Waterloo.

The researchers hope that their findings will aid in promoting employee well-being and that future research will explore broader structural and contextual factors that influence [break](#)-taking.

The paper, [Why Do People \(Not\) Take Breaks? An Investigation of Individuals' Reasons for Taking and for Not Taking Breaks at Work](#), appears in the *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

More information: Vincent Phan et al, Why Do People (Not) Take Breaks? An Investigation of Individuals' Reasons for Taking and for Not Taking Breaks at Work, *Journal of Business and Psychology* (2022).
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