Your Brain Needs More Downtime

1. Take short play breaks

I understand why it often feels necessary to me to pause in the middle of writing something, sometimes in mid-sentence, and play a computer game for a few minutes. Turns out that switching our attention to a simple task like a game gives a different part of our brain the opportunity to step in and problem solve. Of course, playing video games is infinitely more fun than working so sometimes it can be hard to switch back. I find the Pomodoro Technique approach of using 25 minutes of work alternated with five minutes of recreation works well. Give it a try: You'll find you work better and more efficiently if you let your subconscious handle part of the load.

2. Take more frequent vacations

Americans are allotted an average of 10 days vacation time each year. That's not enough according to brain researchers--and many of us don't even take all of it. A Harris survey found Americans ended 2012 with an average of nine unused vacation days. That's a shame because research shows that taking vacations, especially if you travel to a different environment, has solid brain benefits but that these benefits dissipate quickly and ideally should be replenished often.

3. Take one day--or at least one evening--off every week

In one experiment, members of a five-person consultant team were instructed to take one day off every week. In another, executives accustomed to working every evening were told to keep one evening work-free. Though they were reluctant to try it, fearing work would pile up during the breaks, participants actually loved the schedule. Months later they reported better work-life balance, which is hardly surprising. More interestingly, they also reported being more productive and prouder of their accomplishments. Clearly, more hours spent working does not equal better work.

4. Consider a mid-day nap

I know, it's a radical suggestion and not practical in every job or workplace. But there's a body of evidence that shows people who take naps are more alert, more productive, and less prone to mistakes than those who don't. And one reason so many people feel sleepy in the late afternoon may be that napping is hard-wired into our systems, something even the ancient Romans did. If napping is completely out of the question, you can also help yourself with a brief daily meditation break--even as little as five or 10 minutes. That will help your brain by releasing more alpha waves and it will make you happier for the rest of the day.

Source: Scientific American