

# Take a break — a regularly scheduled break



## 5 Ways ...

By Kim Painter

Remember the lunch hour? In a more relaxed, less plugged-in era, office workers would rise up midday to eat food at tables, gossip with co-workers, enjoy a book on a park bench or take a walk in the sun. Can it still be done, without invoking the scorn of desk-bound colleagues or enduring constant electronic interruptions? It can and should. Here are five ways to break free:

*Kim Painter's 5 Ways column appears every other Thursday.*

### 1 Give yourself permission.

As the hair-color ads say, "You're worth it." But taking a break in the workday is more than an indulgence: It's a way of taking care of your body and mind, says Laura Stack, a time-management expert and author who blogs at [theproductivitypro.com](http://theproductivitypro.com). "You have to eliminate the guilt and remind yourself that the more you take care of yourself, the better you are able to take care of others," she says. "We have to recharge our batteries. We have to refresh. It's OK."

### 2 Get a posse.

"So many people are wishing they could just peel themselves away, but they don't have the discipline," Stack says. So invite a co-worker to take daily walks with you or a group to gather for Friday lunches. Pretty soon, you'll be working in a happier place (and feeling less like a shirker and more like a leader).

### 3 Schedule it.

Put it on your calendar and on any electronic schedule visible to co-workers. "Code yourself as 'unavailable.' Nobody has to know why," says Laura Vanderkam, author of *168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think*. And, if a daily hour of "me time" seems impossible right now, commit to just one or two big breaks a week. Or schedule several 15-minute leg-stretching, mind-freeing breaks each day. Keep those appointments, and spend them in "a cone of silence," without electronic devices, Vanderkam says.

### 4 Apply deadline pressure.

The promise of a lunch break could make for a more productive morning: "Treat it as a deadline or a game," Stack says. Pick a meaty task or two that must be finished before lunch and dive in. Plan what you'll finish in the afternoon, too. That will free your mind to enjoy the break, Vanderkam says.

### 5 Eat at your desk.

That's right: If you can't beat them, seem to join them. If you really don't care about eating elsewhere, "pack your lunch and eat it at your desk, and save the time for something you'd rather do," whether it's going to the gym or sneaking out to your car to read, Vanderkam says. (But remember, you still have to schedule this break.) While most co-workers care less about your habits than you think they do, she says, "this has the extra advantage that you can be seen eating at your desk."



**DONT:** Feel guilty telling people you are unavailable during lunch.



**DO:** Recharge your batteries by getting out of the office.

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