

Productivity

It's a common misconception that long hours and busy days add up to high productivity. A 2008 University of Illinois study showed that being tethered to your desk for long hours actually reduces your productivity, while regular short breaks help to keep you focused and energized.

What's more, numerous studies suggest that sitting at your desk for a long time can be detrimental to your health. It has long been understood that extended periods of inactivity are associated with obesity, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and a higher overall risk of death. But, until recently, experts believed that this risk could be offset by regular, vigorous exercise. However, research by Swedish sports scientist Dr Elin Ekblom-Bak, published in 2010, shows that, while exercise is vital for good health, only regular breaks from your desk can reduce these health risks.

This article explores the Pomodoro Technique®, a simple method that improves your productivity and protects your health by encouraging you to schedule regular short breaks into your day.

About the Pomodoro Technique

The Pomodoro Technique was developed by Francesco Cirillo in the 1980s. His best-selling book of the same name was updated and revised in 2013.

"Pomodoro" is Italian for tomato. The technique works by getting you to structure your work in 25-minute sessions, each separated by a short break. Cirillo took the name from the tomato-shaped kitchen timer that he used to manage his time as a university student.

The method is remarkably simple. Each 25-minute session is one "pomodoro." When you complete one, take a five-minute break before embarking on the next. When you have completed four "pomodori," take a longer break to rest and recharge.

At first, it might seem counter-intuitive to take so many breaks throughout the day. But research shows that this can actually enhance your focus when you return to the task you're working on.

As you set your timer, make a commitment to work only on the task at hand. Remember, you have a limited time in which to **focus** 🧠 your attention on it. Then, in your rest break, you can return phone calls or chat with colleagues.

With this in mind, do what you can to **minimize interruptions** 🧠 before you begin. Shut your office door, turn off your phone and email/chat alerts, and let your colleagues know that you don't want to be disturbed.

Step 3: Work on Your Task, and Only That Task

Devote all of your attention to the task at hand for the duration of the session.

Don't allow yourself to become distracted if ideas or thoughts about other tasks pop into your head. Write these down on your notepad and then set them aside for later. If necessary, you can adjust your schedule to work on them in the next session but, for now, stick with what you should be doing.

If you complete your work before your time is up, use the remaining time for routine activities, or for other short tasks. It's a good idea to make a note of how many pomodori each scheduled task takes you, so that you can use this for future planning – or to compare productivity levels as time goes on.

Step 4: Take a Short Break

When your timer goes off, take a five-minute break. You should do this even if you're "**in flow**," 🧠 because these breaks are your time to rest and "recharge your batteries."

You may worry that interrupting your work for a break loses time, but regular breaks will restore your energy and improve your productivity to levels that more than make up for any lost time. Cirillo argues that energy levels are far more important than time. The Pomodoro approach works by maintaining your energy, so that you don't need to waste time working on tasks when your concentration levels are low.

For maximum benefit, use your breaks to get away from your desk. Move around, take a walk, and get some **exercise** 🧠. Even if you just make a cup of coffee, fetch a glass of water, or collect documents from the printer in the next room, the activity is sufficient to avoid the ill-health issues that arise when your large muscles are inactive.