

Taking purposeful breaks throughout your workday is essential—not just for productivity but for your overall wellbeing. But not all breaks are created equal. In fact, a common pitfall I notice from years of coaching teams is that breaks often become disguised extensions of work or "doomscrolling" sessions on phone notifications. That's why I always keep a tiny *"break options list"* taped near my laptop monitor, a personalized *break menu* that reminds me to step away mindfully.



Inspired by guidance from authorities like the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), insights from innovation-focused companies such as MRQ, and the wellbeing enthusiasm of lifestyle pioneers at ChuckleS Life, this post will help you build your own practical and realistic personal break menu with options tailored around micro-breaks, screen fatigue relief, posture change, and clear boundaries enforced by timers.

Why Build a Personal Break Menu?

A personal break menu is not just a random list of activities; it's a thoughtful collection of break options aligned with your work rhythms and physical needs. Building this list encourages you to:

- **Focus on the purpose before activity:** Are you recharging energy? Resetting your posture? Giving your eyes a screen break?
- **Establish clear endings:** Avoid breaks that slide into "just one more email" or endless scrolling on phone notifications.
- **Protect against screen fatigue:** Incorporate options that don't involve staring at your laptop or phone.
- **Use timers and boundaries:** Make your breaks manageable and consistent with set durations.
- **Build healthy habits:** Turn breaks into reliable, restorative rituals that refresh you without requiring new gadgets or gimmicks.

How Long Should Your Breaks Be? The 5–15–30 Minute Menu Approach

The **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)** emphasizes that regular pauses can reduce musculoskeletal discomfort and eye strain. But the reality of a busy day means breaks vary in length depending on schedules and tasks.

Creating a **5, 15, and 30 minute break options list** allows you to pick a break that fits time between meetings, coding sprints, or project work. Here’s a quick example table of a practical *break menu* you can tailor:

Break Length Purpose Sample Activities Tech Involvement 5 minutes Quick energy reset / posture stretch

- Set a 5-minute timer & stand to stretch
- Look out a window and breathe deeply
- Roll shoulders and neck (avoiding laptop)

Minimal or none (avoid phone notifications) 15 minutes Mid-task cooldown / eye strain relief

- Walk around your workspace or outside
- Brief mindfulness or breathing exercise
- Drink water and recharge

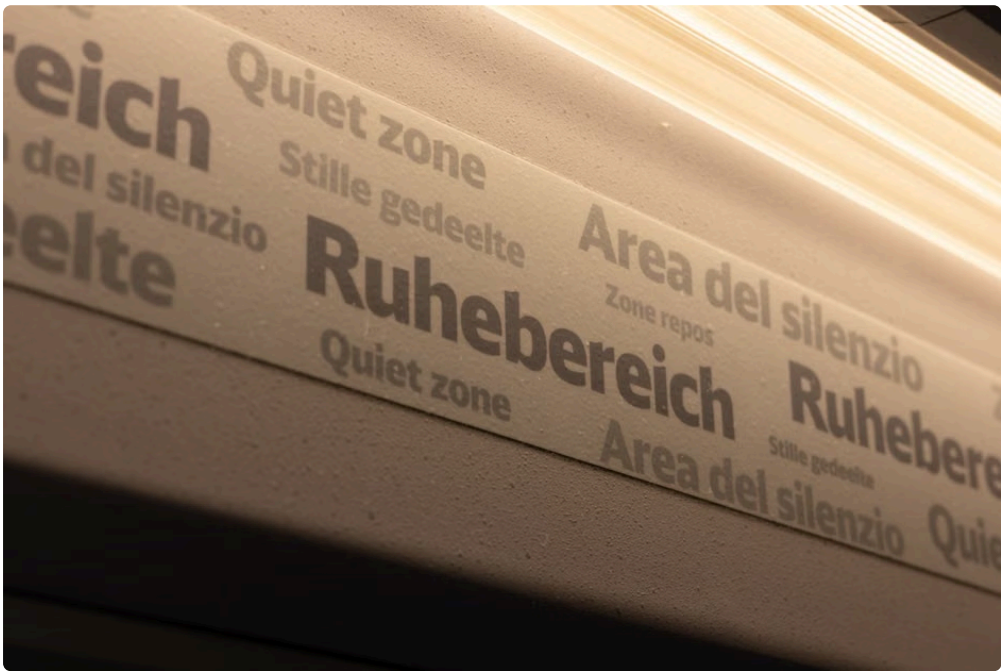
Optional: Use a simple timer app or laptop break-reminder 30 minutes Deeper mental break / posture realignment

- Light home stretches/yoga
- Read a chapter from a non-work book
- Prepare a healthy snack or meal

Minimal tech or none — focus on offline

Designing Your Personal Break Options List

While some workplace wellbeing programs suggest buying new gear or apps, I firmly believe your personal break menu should depend on what’s immediately accessible and doable in daily life. Doing so means you’ll actually use it.



Step 1: Identify the Break Purpose Before Choosing an Activity

Every break should start with a clear intention. Ask yourself:

- Am I physically stiff or cramped from sitting?
- Are my eyes tired from screen time?
- Do I need to mentally disconnect to refocus?
- Am I feeling distracted or restless?

This clarifies which break options fit. For example, if your laptop and phone notifications have drained your attention, an ideal break is one with no screens—like a brief walk or deep breathing. Relying on your phone as a “break” is a trap I warn against because it often triggers doomscrolling rather than true rest.

Step 2: Incorporate Micro-Breaks with Clear Endings

Micro-breaks—brief pauses under five minutes—can greatly reduce strain when done consistently. The key is to set a visible timer to avoid them seeping into longer distractions. I always recommend setting a 5-minute timer; it sounds silly, but it’s incredibly effective for giving your brain and body permission to step away, then return refreshed.

When your timer ends, close the break decisively. Resist the temptation to “just check one more email” or glance at your phone notifications. This keeps boundaries intact and your break restorative.

Step 3: Prioritize Screen and Posture Changes

Screen fatigue is real and can negatively impact your concentration, causing headaches and eye strain. The HSE’s guide recommends regular visual breaks incorporating the “20-20-20 rule”: every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds.

But don’t stop there—combine this eye relaxation with posture shifts. Try standing and stretching shoulders, neck, and back during your 5-minute micro-breaks. You’ll feel more alert and less achy when you return to your laptop.

Step 4: Use Timers and Boundaries to Build Break Habits

Tools like laptop break reminder apps or a simple kitchen timer keep your breaks on track. This creates a habit loop: you stop, pause fully for your break, and return when time is up. Habit-building depends on consistent cues and rewards, so set your break options list where you’ll see it (beside your screen) and use timers to reinforce:

- Break start cue (timer, posture trigger, calendar alert)
- Engagement in your chosen break activity from your menu
- Clear break end with timer notification
- Return to work refreshed, not distracted

Sample Personal Break Menu Inspired by MRQ and ChuckleS Life

To spark your own list, here’s a practical menu I’ve crafted, inspired by teams at MRQ and the wellness-focused content from ChuckleS Life. Their approach mixes movement, humor, and mindful rest—which I think every break needs!

5-Minute Break Options

- Look out a window and watch the clouds or nature (screen off!)
- Perform simple seated stretches—neck circles, shoulder rolls

- Set a 5-minute timer and practice deep belly breathing
- Stand and do light walking around the room
- Listen to a favorite joke or short funny podcast clip from ChuckleS Life for a mood lift

15-Minute Break Options

- Go for a brisk walk—preferably outdoors or around your workspace
- Journal quick gratitude notes or a mind dump to clear cluttered thoughts
- Hydrate with water and prepare a light snack
- Follow a short guided meditation or mindfulness audio (no screens needed)
- Try some gentle yoga poses recommended by wellbeing experts at MRQ

30-Minute Break Options

- Read a chapter from a non-work-related book or magazine
- Prepare and enjoy a healthy meal or fresh smoothie
- Engage in a hobby that doesn't involve screens: drawing, knitting, gardening
- Do a longer yoga or stretching session to reset posture
- Take a power nap if your space allows (10-20 minutes)

Final Thoughts: Keep It Real and Accessible

Your personal break menu should be realistic and accessible—no fancy gear required. Your **laptop** can double as your timer or reminder system, but avoid letting **phone notifications** hijack your relaxation time. Remember, a proper break means disconnecting both physically and mentally from work tasks.

When creating your break options list, consider printing it or handwriting it and keeping it taped near your screen. This simple habit might just be your best defense against burnout and screen fatigue in today's meeting-heavy days.

Incorporate your own favored activities, reflect on what truly refreshes your body and mind, and use timers to build clear micro-break habits with boundaries. Soon these pauses won't just be interruptions—they'll become powerful productivity and wellbeing tools.

Here's to mindful breaks [how to eat away from desk](#) and renewed energy—start your personal break menu today!