

# BREAK SOFTWARE

Many of us spend long hours staring into a screen – tapping or typing away – despite the fact we know that it is one of the biggest risk factors for developing an overuse injury. Break programs are a great way to develop healthy computing habits and ensure that you're taking necessary breaks whilst reducing your risk of developing an overuse injury. This help sheet is designed to assist you in finding a good break software program. Here's what you should be looking for:

## **THE INSTALLATION PROCESS**

If the installation of a programs take longer than 5 (to a toe-tapping 10) minutes, then it probably involves too much clicking and is more complicated than it needs to be.

## **CUSTOMISATION**

It's useful to know that a program can suit your changing needs. You may need more regular breaks when typing up an article than if you were reading through online resources. The ideal break software program needs to be easily customisable to your tasks.

## **CLICKLESS SOFTWARE OPTIONS**

Preventing an overuse injury means aiming to reduce unnecessary hand work, which includes clicking! So, the ideal break program needs to work alongside clickless software.

## **DELAY OPTIONS**

Sometimes a short break is all it takes to forget your train of thought, which is why it's important for break programs to have a delay option. This is an option that allows you to postpone your break for the desired (or preset) period, usually a couple of minutes. Wonderful for allowing you to finish that last sentence before you rest your fingers!

### EXERCISES AND STRETCHES

Whilst just removing your hands from the keyboard and taking your eyes off of the screen is a step in the right direction, stretching and exercising during your break can be even more beneficial. If a break program includes stretches or exercises that you can complete during your break – it's not just procrastination, it's prevention!

Here's the verdict on five of the well known break programs I've trialled over the past few months.

### PC-Work Break

PC WorkBreak provides you with reminders like 'micro-break', 'stretch', 'eye exercises' and 'walk'. Downloading and installing this program takes less than 5 minutes, but unfortunately things become trickier from here on.

The settings on this program – in particular the length of, and intervals between, breaks – are difficult to adjust, and when adjusted do not appear at the appropriate times. However, when the break window does eventually appear, a countdown timer showed that at least the break was for the appropriate duration. The window itself doesn't like to be minimized to the task bar and so becomes a hassle when trying to work. Overall, the program is bit of an annoyance, and demonstrates that what appears to be a simple program isn't always a better program.

### Smart Break

SmartBreak is an excellent break software program that is easy to install and adjust that cleverly displays a "stress bar" on your screen to indicate how stressed your hands and fingers are from computer use (taking into consideration clicking and typing). When this bar reaches its maximum, a break begins. All breaks with this program can be delayed, and you even have the option to play music during your break!

The SmartBreak window minimizes easily to the task bar, and stays put. The stress bar remains on the screen and is moveable, so that it's hardly even noticeable.

Messages such as "rest your wrists", "stand up and look around", "breathe deep and

exhale slowly" and "blink your eyes" or others that you can add yourself alternate appearances during breaks. You can even set a child lock password to prevent younger children from prolonged use of computers.

### **Workrave**

Workrave claims to "assist in the recovery and prevention of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)" by "frequently alerting you to take micro-pauses, rest breaks and restricting you to your daily limit". Although the icon cannot be minimized to the task bar, it is as small as the recycling bin icon on your desktop, so you hardly even notice it as you type! The duration and time between all micro-pauses and rest breaks is easy to customise, as is the daily limit. Workrave combines the best two features of both PC-Workbreak and Smart Break. A count-down timer tells you how long until your next break, and during rest breaks animated stretch videos pop up so that you can perform the easy stretches in real time, whilst sitting at your desk!

### **Rest Break**

Installing Rest Break is extremely quick, and is followed by a user guide that is written in plain English. This guide includes a list of helpful keyboard shortcuts you can use when typing up documents. Although it doesn't look as flashy as some of the others, the program itself only performs a simple task. This break program behaves more like a countdown timer, which can be easily skipped by clicking the 'OK' button on the popup window. This program has no stretch messages or animations, no daily limit, and no fancy images. There is no limit to how many times you can delay the break, as the program does not lock you out of your computer for the break duration. It's the perfect program if you're forgetful and just need something to remind you to break!

### **RSI Guard (Stretch Edition)**

This program takes 10 minutes to install, with Initial set up including a series of questions designed to understand your computer usage. For example, the program asks how likely you are to postpone breaks, what type of equipment you use and if you'd like to try out their accompanying clickless software. You can even select the option for a shared workspace to minimise distraction for your co-workers.

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During breaks a small window appears describing stretches that you can also perform along with the moving image. You have the option to postpone breaks for two or ten minutes, or even skip the break entirely. If you select to postpone or skip your break, another small window appears asking if you're really sure! It requires you to type a word into a textbox to determine just how tired your fingers really are. This is an excellent feature for those who have a "work now, break later" attitude to computer use. Remember, the whole idea behind break software is to prevent the need for long periods of uncomfortable rest that you may experience later on!

PROGRAM	SPACE	SYSTEM	BEST FEATURE	COST	DOWNLOAD
PC-Work Break	2.16MB	Windows 2000, 2003, XP, Vista, 7 and 8.	Quick Installation.	FREE	<a href="http://www.trisunsoft.com/pc-work-break/">http://www.trisunsoft.com/pc-work-break/</a>
Smart Break	2.1MB	Windows 2003, 2008, XP, Vista, 7 and 8.	Stress bar that tracks your stress level.	Free 30 day trial or \$9.99	<a href="http://www.inchwest.com/smartbreak.htm">http://www.inchwest.com/smartbreak.htm</a>
Workrave	14.3MB	All Windows Systems	Stretch animations that you can perform in real time.	FREE	<a href="http://www.workrave.org/">http://www.workrave.org/</a>
Rest Break	3MB	Windows Vista, 7 and 8.	List of keyboard shortcuts in help guide.	FREE	<a href="http://www.restbreak.com/freedownload/">http://www.restbreak.com/freedownload/</a>
RSI Guard	20MB	All Windows Systems	Are you sure you want to skip your break?	Free 45 day trial or \$65	<a href="http://rsiguard.remedyinteractive.com/">http://rsiguard.remedyinteractive.com/</a>



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Room 2.08, Griffin Centre  
20 Genge Street  
Canberra City

**BECOME A MEMBER AT [WWW.RSI.ORG.AU](http://WWW.RSI.ORG.AU)**

Low Income	\$15
Standard Income	\$25
2 Year Offer	\$40
Organisation	\$60

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