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Productivity

Tip: There's an App for That

Have you tried productivity apps that use gaming to help you tackle your to-do list? Some apps let you track work performance statistics and strive to beat your personal best. Others create motivation and competition, or gaming elements, such as avoiding zombie attacks, and motivate you toward fitness or productivity goals. Search your device's app store for the latest productivity apps.

Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date information visit [coronavirus.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus).

Interruptions Wrecking Your Work?

What's keeping you from being at your productive best?

The most common distractions on the job are using personal phones for texting, online searches and social media. According to a Gallup poll, more than 50% of U.S. smartphone owners admit to checking their phones a few times an hour during work.

Key to working better is avoiding interruptions, most of which are under your control just by being aware of them. While people are part of working, they can also break the focus and momentum of your work tasks. If you can, set aside specific no-interruption periods and post them via email, or escape to a quiet area to work undisturbed.



Quit burning time online.

The more information you have pouring in — email, news stories, social media — the more you may feel like you're doing something. But in reality, you're losing focus and working less. Switch off your phone and, when possible, skip checking email during valuable work time.

To meet or not? Always weigh the options before calling a meeting. If it's just information sharing, you're probably better off emailing it. But if brainstorming or an in-depth discussion is needed, an in-person meeting (if allowed) or video conference might be best.



One positive interruption — take a 30-second personal pause.

Standing up, stretching or deep breathing can instantly recharge your productivity, especially when you're working at a computer.

While working well depends on your specific job and work environment, watch for ways that you and your coworkers can avoid interruptions and work smarter.

Calming Techniques

So you can get back to life.

Ever been nervous about a work project, a doctor appointment or making a presentation in a meeting?

Everyone feels anxious sometimes and the result can be headaches, stomach upset, a racing heartbeat or feeling miserably tense. These days, we all find ourselves in challenging circumstances. At times like this, you want to calm down and get the most out of your day — but how?

For ongoing anxiety, learning and practicing yoga and meditation can help. There are also calming techniques to soothe anxious feelings while you're on the go. No matter how much or little time they require, these stress-soothing strategies can produce a similar effect. They spark the body's natural relaxation response, slowing breathing and heart rate, controlling blood pressure and promoting a sense of well-being.

Tips for going from frazzled to calm so you can get on with your life:

- **Focus on your breathing.** Take long, deep breaths, inhaling into your abdomen. Exhale slowly and repeat several times.
- **Silently repeat a calming phrase.** Some people use a short prayer, mantra, or a soothing phrase such as "All is well" or "I am fine."



- **Mentally scan your body.** While anxiously waiting for a meeting, breathe slowly as you focus on one part of your body at a time. Consciously relax your muscles, mentally releasing any tension you feel there.
- Tell yourself, "I can do this."

Developing Patience

Some people seem born patient. Others feel impatient several times a day. You may sense it building before you express it. Once spoken, it can have negative consequences for the people in your life.

Learn to recognize your personal signs of escalating impatience: frustration, muscle tension, clenching teeth, anxiety, irritability, rushing and shallow breathing. They signal it's time to step back and change your reaction.

Stop the cycle. Reacting to situations with anger and frustration may provide emotional instant gratification that is ultimately self-defeating. Accept those feelings for what they are, but practice responding in more positive ways.

Tune up self-talk. Impatience often results from the negative loop playing inside your head, which tells you "I don't like this," or "This isn't going my way." Slow down and tune into your inner voice during moments when you're impatient; then find a way to manage that discomfort more successfully.



Strategies for Self-Motivation

What helps motivate you at work? Maybe it's a motivational poster on your wall or a high achiever you admire. Ultimately, the best incentive for getting the results you want at work is you.

Intrinsic motivation comes from within and drives you to push past your limits, reach your goals and become a top performer.

Unleash your inner motivator four ways:

Step outside your safe zone. When you stay in comfortable boundaries, you never challenge yourself. Take on something unfamiliar and untried, whether it's taking on a new project or speaking up in a meeting.

Accept occasional mistakes as a part of learning. Instead of self-criticism, review what you can do better next time and realize you have what it takes to try again.

Improve and learn. Turn to resources such as a mentor or self-help tools (books, classes or online resources) to help you pursue your goals confidently.

Take care of yourself. When you get enough sleep, work on staying calm, exercise regularly and eat nutritiously, you'll feel better able to accomplish what you want.



Take a break. When you're feeling agitated, try to move away, mentally or physically. Take a walk, do relaxation stretches, call a friend, or spend time in quiet reflection. Once you are calm, return to the situation with a fresh outlook.

You can improve your emotional outlook by building good health: regular exercise, good nutrition and adequate sleep. You will have more patience when you are well rested and feeling your best.