

Brain breaks for cognitive wellbeing

Brain breaks are simple physical and mental exercises. They have a positive effect on learning by:

- increasing engagement and cognitive functioning
- supporting the brain maturation process
- enhancing focus, mood and learning
- increasing students' perceived competence

Furthermore, if the brain breaks are physical, they have the additional benefits of:

- increasing circulation
- increasing the oxygen in the bloodstream which leads to improved concentration
- allowing the students to get out of their chairs

Suggested brain breaks you can do at home

Wink-snap

1. Stand up.
2. Wink your left eye and snap your right-hand index finger and thumb at the same time.
3. Wink your right eye and snap your left-hand index finger and thumb at the same time.
4. Switch from left to right as fast as you can.

Pressure point massage

1. Stand up straight.
2. Gently massage the pressure point between your thumb and pointer finger.
3. Switch hands after 30 seconds.

Book balance

1. Balance a book on your head.
2. Try to stand up, walk to the front door, walk back and sit down without dropping the book.

Thumb pointing challenge

1. Clench your left fist and give a 'thumbs up' sign.
2. With your right hand, keep your thumb tucked in and point your pointer finger directly at the raised thumb on the left hand.
3. Then switch positions, with the left pointer finger pointing at the right hand's raised thumb.
4. Swap between these two positions and try to improve your speed and coordination.

My day mimes

1. You have 30 seconds to act out what you have done so far today – starting with waking. You must do this silently and see if anyone can guess what you did.

Pencil jumps

1. Place a pencil on the floor and jump over forwards and backwards, 10 times.
2. Then jump 10 more times side to side.

Pen flipping brain break

1. Take a pen and flip it one revolution.
2. Now do the same thing with your other hand.
3. Now get a pen for both hands and try to do both pens at the same time.
4. If you really are good at that, then try to throw the pens up into the air and catch them in opposite hands. This is tough.

Movement breaks for physical wellbeing

Research shows that integrating physical activity into learning has the following benefits:

- renewed energy and increased oxygen levels
- increased oxygen improves focus and memory
- increased efficiency in learning
- gives brains time to process information
- developing social skills through movement
- enhanced academic behaviour and achievement.

Suggested movement breaks you can do at home

Students should seek permission from their parent or carer before doing any of the following.

- Stretching or standing for 5 minutes.
- Challenge yourself to hold something for 1 minute.
- If you have a sibling at home, see who can balance the longest on one foot.
- Dance along to your favourite song. If you don't have one, see if you can remember all the moves to "Hot Potato" by the Wiggles.
- Wall or chair push-ups are a good way to refocus.
- Go to your backyard (if you have one) and kick a ball around or sit and read in a shady spot.
- Ask your parents to take you for a quick walk, if they can.
- Move your workstation to your balcony or backyard for an hour if you can.

Mindfulness for emotional wellbeing

Mindfulness is about focusing attention on the present, rather than focusing on the future.

Research shows that mindfulness:

- Increases self-awareness, social awareness, and self-confidence.
- Increases emotional self-regulation.
- Reduces the severity of depression, anxiety and ADHD.
- Builds resilience.

Outside where possible

Your backyard or balcony can become a place for you to practice quiet reflection and focus your thoughts. Alternatives for inside are made for activity below in case you don't have either.

Try some of the following:

Gardening

Plant herbs or do some weeding.

Think about the texture of the soil and each plant you touch.

Inside alternative: Grow seedling on a window sill.

Sun meditation

Close your eyes and think about the warmth of the sun and the feeling of the sun's rays on your skin.

Allow the warmth to spread to your muscles, joints and bones.

Think about the journey the light and heat have made to come and warm you.

Think about the glowing energy of the sun.

Inside alternative: Find a sunny spot on the floor and sit there to do this activity.

Eating mindfully

Before you start, look at what you're eating.

- Think about its shape and colours.
- What does it smell like?

Chew it slowly, thinking about how it feels in your mouth and what it tastes like.

- What does your chewing sound like?
- When you swallow the food, can you feel it moving down into your stomach?

Inside alternative: Go and sit somewhere you don't normally visit (but are allowed to be).

Mindful breathing

Close your eyes and think about your breathing.

Breathe in through your mouth and out of your nose.

- Can you feel the air coming into your mouth?
- Can you feel it coming out of your nose?
- What does it feel like?
- Can you feel the rise and fall of your chest or stomach?

If you can't feel anything, place your hand on your stomach and notice how your hand gently rises and falls with your breath.

Remind yourself that trees release the oxygen we inhale and absorb the carbon dioxide we exhale.

As we breathe, we are borrowing air before returning it to nature.

Inside alternative: Sit near an open window.

Colouring

Colour something. Focus on the colours and designs.

Listening to music

Focus on the sound of just one instrument – the drums is a great one to start with.

Inside alternative: Lie down on your bedroom floor with the door shut and your eyes closed.