Workrave is a free program that assists in the recovery and prevention of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI). The program monitors your activity. Using this information, it frequently reminds you to take breaks, and restricts you to your daily limit.

Workrave alerts you to take a break in an undisturbing manner. When it is time for your break, a friendly small popup window appears asking you to take a break. This window automatically moves out of the way if you keep on working. However, if you ignore these hints too often Workrave acts less friendly and pops up the break window for your own good. The break windows can be configured to completely block your computer for the duration of the break.

Although you are reading this text in English, Workrave is available in several languages. Danish, Dutch, English, German, Polish and Spanish are currently supported.

Workrave continuously monitors your keyboard and mouse activity. Hence, if you leave your computer running while you are at a meeting, Workrave will notice that you are taking a natural break from the computer.

Is switching forth and back between several PC’s part of your job? Traditional pause software does not notice that you switch between PC’s. Therefore, your pause scheme is not correctly enforced. Not so for Workrave: it monitors all your PC’s, so that it exactly knows for how long you have been working. Your pause scheme is correctly enforced across all your PC’s.

Studies have revealed that taking several short pauses an hour (i.e. micro-pauses) helps in keeping yourself healthy and help injuries to heal. Workrave supports these micro pauses, next to the regular rest break. Furthermore, Workrave can enforce a daily-limit.

Workrave is free software. Not only does it come free of charge, but you are also free to make modifications to the program. The authors of Workrave welcome your contributions.

**Product details**

- **OS**: UNIX, Windows
- **Version**: 1.4.0
- **Price**: $0 / €0
- **URL**: www.workrave.com
Welcome to Workrave

Workrave is a program that assists in the recovery and prevention of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI). The program frequently alerts you to take micro-pauses, rest breaks and restricts you to your daily limit. Please refer to the feature comparison for a complete list of features, and how the program performs with respect to other programs on the market. The program runs on GNU/Linux and Microsoft Windows.

View more screenshots
Task Change Software

Why should I use task change software?

What are “Micro-breaks”?

What are “Rest breaks”?

How do I get WorkRave?

How do I use WorkRave?

Why should I use task change software?

As a result of the technological advancements of today's workplace, many workers no longer need to leave their desks in order to perform many tasks of the past, such as copying documents, sending and receiving mail and filing. Accordingly, computer users now face prolonged periods of sustained seated postures accompanied by long periods of keyboard data entry. Prolonged static postures and muscle fatigue are major risk factors in the development of upper limb disorders (ULDs)\(^1\); an umbrella term for a range of disorders of the hand, wrist, arm, shoulder, neck and upper back, symptoms of which may include pain, tingling, ache, and restriction of movement.

Incorporating appropriate “microbreaks” and “rest breaks” (task changes) to your work routine can delay the onset of muscle fatigue reducing your risk of developing discomfort or ULD.

UCL suggests the use of WorkRave; a program that prompts you to incorporate micro-breaks and task changes into your working day. Performing the exercises that Workrave provides will help further help reduce muscle fatigue. Task change software should be used to prevent fatigue not to recover from it! If you wait for fatigue or discomfort to occur before you take a work break, you have waited too long!
What are “micro breaks”?  

Micro-breaks are short frequent breaks from the same task: several short breaks are more beneficial to the body in delaying the onset of fatigue than one long break!

What are “Rest breaks”?

“Rest breaks” in this context (i.e. Workrave) refers to a “task change” from the continuous activity just performed to an activity that promotes movement of your upper limbs, not to a complete rest from any work activity. Moving your limbs refreshes the muscles, aiding their recovery from the effort of working for extended periods of time and reducing muscle fatigue. The exercises prompted by Workrave are ideal for this purpose but it is also important that you move away from your desk to refresh the muscles of the back and legs, which have also been working hard to maintain your sitting posture. Try to perform a task change that makes you stand up/move around for a few minutes: consider moving your printer away from your desk so you have to walk to it, grab a drink of water from the cooler etc. The important thing is that you do not sit at the computer/desk for the total task change and you do not return to the continuous activity for 10 minutes.

**NB** If you have persistent or recurrent symptoms of upper limb or back pain or discomfort, you will require more personalised occupational health advice about suitable Workrave settings and other workplace adjustments. In this case you should arrange an appointment with the Occupational Health Service for assessment and advice. It is very important that you discuss any problems you are experiencing with your manager, to ensure s/he is involved if any changes need to be made to your work.

How do I get Workrave?

Available from Workrave website here: [http://www.workrave.org/download/](http://www.workrave.org/download/)
How do I use Workrave?

Once you have downloaded Workrave (see “How do I get Workrave” above):

1. Right click on the Workrave icon in your task bar to see:

   Choose “Preferences” to open the settings windows below

2. Choose “Micro-break” to see:

   Choose “Prompt before breaking” if you want to get a 30 second warning that a break is due.

   You are strongly advised not to choose “Show “Postpone” and “Skip button” as it is not good practice to regularly skip micro-breaks.

   Choose “suspend time when inactive” so that the counter stops when you are not using the mouse or keyboard. This means you are only prompted to break from continuous activity.

Tick “Enable timer”

- Set “Time between breaks” for every 20 minutes
- Set “Break duration” for 30 seconds
- Set “Postpone time” as “0”, postponing your micro-breaks / task changes increases the duration of continuous activity performed
- During a microbreak, it is important to boost blood supply and therefore the oxygen supply to the muscles by moving your limbs – try the exercises suggested by Workrave.

Often we feel that we can't take a microbreak because we are too busy and under too much pressure. This is the time you need a microbreak the most!! Take the few seconds required for the microbreak in order to prevent fatigue and you can boost your concentration and tolerance to activity throughout the entire day. This is why we advise you not to choose the option of 'skip' or 'postpone' when setting up your Workrave schedule.

However, by choosing the 'suspend time when inactive' prompt will ensure that you are only prompted to break during continued keyboard or mouse activity. This is all explained in 'How do I use Workrave?'

Of course, it will take time to get used to a new way of working, but it will become second nature with practise.

3. Choose “Rest break” to see:

Choose “Prompt before breaking” if you want to get a 30 second warning that a break is due,

You are strongly advised not to choose “Show ‘Postpone’ and ‘Skip button’ as it is not good practice to regularly skip ‘rest breaks’

Choose “suspend time when inactive” so that the counter stops when you are not using the mouse or keyboard. This means you are only prompted to break from continuous activity.

Choose the number of exercises you want to perform during the task break

Tick “Enable timer”

- Set “Time between breaks” for maximum of 50 minutes; the more intensive the work e.g. continuous keying / use of mouse the more frequently you may need to change tasks e.g. every 45 mins

- Set “Break duration” for 10 minutes
• Set “Postpone time” as “0” in each box

During a task change, perform any job function that does not require keying/mousing at the computer (filing, copying, etc.). In other words, perform tasks that work the muscles differently than the keying/mousing activity works the muscles.

4. Choose “Daily limit” to see:

![Preferences window showing Daily limit options](image)

Do not tick “Enable timer” as there is no need to limit the amount activity performed.

Workrave should be used to prevent fatigue not to recover from it! If you wait for fatigue or discomfort to occur before you take a work break, you have waited too long!

---

1 For further information on promoting good health in the office see www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/occ_health/office_guide.php

2 http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/occ_health/management_referral.php
Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated: 2010-06-05

Contents

- Installation & Deinstallation
  - Uninstallation fails because the program is still running. How do I proceed?
- Breaks
  - What are good values for the micropause, restbreak and daily limit timers?
  - Could you implement support for reading the screen during a break?
  - Has anyone done any physiological studies to determine good break lengths?
- Miscellaneous
  - What is the difference between normal, quiet and suspended mode?
  - How do I change the Workrave language (locale) of Workrave?
  - Is it possible to embed the status window into the Windows taskbar?
- Contributing
  - I would like to help translate Workrave. Where do I start?
  - I really like your software. Do you accept donations?

Installation & Deinstallation

Uninstallation fails because the program is still running. How do I proceed?

You simply cannot uninstall Workrave while the program is running. So, first quit the program by right clicking the little status window (or sheep icon in the system tray) to open the menu. Select "Quit", and then run the uninstaller.

Breaks

What are good values for the micropause, restbreak and daily limit timers?

The main problem here is that the settings that are required are different from person to person.

For example, I use workrave with a 25 second micropause every two and a half minutes, and a 10 minute restbreak every 20 minutes. I need these frequent breaks, because I'm recovering from RSI. And as I recover, I change the settings to fewer breaks.

If you have never had any problem at all (using the computer, that is), then you may want much fewer breaks, say 10 seconds micropause every 10 minutes, and a 5 minute restbreak every hour.

It is very hard to give proper guidelines here. My best advice is to play around and see what works for you. Which settings "feel right". Basically, that's how Workrave's defaults evolve.

Could you implement support for reading the screen during a break?

We often receive requests from users that would like to keep on reading the screen during a micropause. Think of implementing support for transparent micropause windows, or making the micropause window position configurable.

No. Really, you should not be reading the screen during a micropause. Adding support for the requested feature defeats the purpose of Workrave. Relax your eyes, and stare past the monitor during a micropause.

Even if you are not suffering from eyestrain, please keep in mind that staying put in the same position while reading the screen is not good for your wrists as well. By staying in the same position you restrict the bloodflow to your arms, which increases their tension recovery time.

Has anyone done any physiological studies to determine good break lengths?

Computer terminal work and the benefits of microbreaks


Computer mouse use and cumulative trauma disorders of the upper extremities


Multiple nerve entrapment syndromes in office workers


Musculoskeletal disorders in operators of visual display terminals

Frequently Asked Questions

Normal

"Normal" mode is for normal usage. It will prompt you to break and, if so configured, force you to take the break.

Quiet

"Quiet" mode is pretty much like normal mode, in that it will still register your activity, and notify you need to take a break, but it will not actually prompt you to take one, nor block you from using the computer. This is typically used when you want to show your activity on your computer to someone else. You are using the computer doing the explaining and showing, but you do not want to be interrupted by breaks. Once you return to normal mode, Workrave will bother you with taking an "overdue" break, if necessary.

Suspended

In "Suspended" mode, workrave no longer records your activity. This is typically used when someone else is using your computer for a brief time. In these cases, you may not want to quit workrave, and you also don't want the activity recorded, because it isn't yours, and hence you will not need to take any "overdue" breaks. When someone else is using the computer for a longer time, it is best to quit workrave altogether.

Miscellaneous

How do I change the Workrave language (locale) of Workrave?

Workrave takes over the language preferences from the operating system. It does not offer an additional language preference itself. On Windows, you can change the locale in the control panel: "Regional and Language settings".

Is it possible to embed the status window into the Windows taskbar?

Yes, version 1.6.0 (and higher) supports this. Right-click on the taskbar, and activate "Workrave" from the list of toolbars.

Contributing

I would like to help translate Workrave, where do I start?

Workrave uses GNU gettext for dealing with translations. Translating Workrave boils down to providing a translated text for each and every English text used in Workrave. All of the texts to be translated are listed in one file (.po). For each text you need to provide the translation by inserting it in that very same .po file.

Translating can be a very tedious job. Luckily there is tooling available to help you. For example, for GNU/Linux, there is kbabel, gTranslator and many others. For Windows, there is poEdit. And for GNU/Emacs, there is the excellent M-x po-mode.

So first, you'll have to pick any of the above tools, depending on the platform you are working on. Install that tool first, and get acquainted with it. From that point on, you can start translating using the .po files over at: http://github.com/rcaeters/workrave/blob/branch_v1_9/po/

I really like your software, do you accept donations?

I am glad that you like our software. We appreciate any donations, however, we prefer donations on a meta-level. Meaning, instead of donating directly to us, free software authors, we feel it is a better idea to donate to a foundation that ensures that the conditions amongst which free software can flourish remain valid.

Therefore, I would like you to donate to the Electronic Frontier Foundation directly. Please visit: https://secure.eff.org/ — you'll find paypal (a.o.) links there.