

# Take micro-breaks

## Fostering a culture that enables pausing

Rest in 20 seconds to make a difference.

### The risk

Repetitive tasks and sustained static postures can quietly build strain over time and eventually lead to overuse injury.

Tasks such as walking continuously, changing bedding, preparing medication, vacuuming, wiping surfaces, standing at bedsides for long periods and repeated paperwork or screen use can be particularly troublesome for kaimahi (workers). Discomfort may start small, and be intermittent, but gradually worsen and become more persistent over time.

### Why this matters

Kaimahi (workers) often notice early signs but keep going if they feel rushed, observed or unsure whether pausing is acceptable. Even light tasks can add up and lead to injury. These tasks are often not perceived as strenuous enough to need a break. Discomfort may start small, and be intermittent, but gradually worsen and become more persistent over time. Taking 20 seconds to reset can make all the difference.

### Your role as a leader

Micro-breaks only work when people feel permitted to take them. As a leader, you can foster a culture and set the tone for whether micro-breaks are truly safe to take.

#### What this looks like in practice:

- Make micro-breaks visible by taking them yourself.
- Call out **20-second** resets as good practice, not interruptions.
- Reinforce that early resets help prevent bigger issues later.
- Encourage task rotation, support or equipment when resets are not enough.
- Back kaimahi (workers) when they pause or speak up.

### Barrier busting

Here are some common barriers that stop kaimahi (workers) from taking micro-breaks and what you as a leader can remove:

- **Breaks are inconvenient and it feels like 'slacking':** normalise pausing by naming it as part of doing the job well. Clearly state that 20 second micro-breaks are expected and supported.
- **'It's a waste of time because I'm not sore':** reinforce that micro-breaks are about staying able, not reacting to pain.
- **Working by yourself:** kaimahi (workers) may feel they have to push through. Check in with kaimahi (workers) about when and how they take 20 second micro-breaks and agree on safe moments to pause. Clearly name who to contact if the strain doesn't ease.
- **The task feels too easy to need a break:** remind kaimahi (workers) that 'easy' tasks still create strain when repeated. Micro-breaks prevent small loads from becoming big problems.

## Ask the team

Use these questions to open up a **kōrero** (conversation) about what your team is really experiencing:

1. When do you notice strain or fatigue starting to creep in during your shift?
2. What makes it easier or harder to take a quick reset when you need it?

## Commitment

Complete this commitment with your team or with individuals eg, **'This week I/we will actively take micro-breaks every 30 minutes or when we notice early signs of strain'.**

This week I/we will...



**Continue the kōrero (conversation):**

Follow up regularly to focus on taking 20 second micro-breaks by asking curious questions such as **'What helped you take resets this week and what got in the way?'**



## Other resources

- **Take micro-breaks** quick reference guide
- **Take micro-break pause prompts** micro card
- **Move Well: Skills for kaimahi** elearning
  - Holistic wellbeing
  - Te Whare Tapa Whā
  - Videos from Holistic wellbeing
- **Move Well: Focus on leaders** elearning
  - Conversations that matter
  - Prevention and response
  - Injury reporting and data collection
  - Applying the learning - coaching guide