

# The Case For Taking A Break

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## The Case For Taking A Break

Jacklynn Lesniak MS BSN RN NEA-BC, Chief Nursing Officer and the Senior Vice President of Patient Care Services at [Cancer Treatment Centers of America® \(CTCA\)](#) at Midwestern Regional Medical Center (Midwestern) shares the case for taking a break. CTCA has pioneered innovative practices around nurse rest and rejuvenation and has seen significant results.

*Take*  
A BREAK  
— (it's) —  
*good for*  
YOU

Employers and nurses need to work together to ensure that every nurse gets – and takes – adequate break time during their shifts. According to the American Nurses Association's (ANA) 2016 Health Risk Appraisal, over half of nurses work through their breaks. Not getting adequate time for rest and renewal can cause adverse health consequences and can impact patient safety as well. Before you skip that break and try to work through any opportunities to pause and rest, consider Lesniak's points below.

One strategy that has worked at CTCA at Midwestern is a staff-driven concept of a renewal room. It's a quiet space that includes forms of self-care such as aromatherapy, music therapy, a massage chair, space to write in a journal, and even a small waterfall.

Initial survey data revealed that 96 percent of the nurses on staff reported using the room – and at least three of the relaxation techniques within it – to greatly reduce their stress level. The rooms proved so successful that the administration

supported the creation of six additional renewal rooms in various locations throughout the hospital. What's more, the hospital renamed traditional break rooms. They are now called "serenity rooms" to remind staff of the importance of self-care and renewal.

The nursing staff at CTCA at Midwestern also implemented a new role they call the "unit shift leader." This person is a highly skilled and experienced nurse who usually does not have patient assignments. Instead, his/her role is to relieve other nurses, so each member of the staff can get adequate renewal time.

### Take control of your breaks

The ability of nurses to get adequate rest and rejuvenation should be important to all employers, but individual nurses do not have to wait for management to make improvements.

### Make self-care a priority with these four strategies:

1. **Buddy up** — "Think about the highest quality of care you expect to deliver and what you need to make it happen. Once you come up with that list, find a mentor or a buddy who can help you meet your expectation," says Lesniak.
2. **Find a mentor** — Find somebody that you can reach out to for advice. It may be your supervisor but it may not be.
3. **Turn off your cell phone** — When you take breaks, make sure you're getting high-quality personal time. One of the reasons the renewal rooms at CTCA at Midwestern work so well is because nurses don't take their pagers or cell phones into the room. This gives them time to focus on self-care and regroup.
4. **Think outside the box** — Consider small ways you can help relieve stress on the job, like these [Simple Ways to Relieve Stress Today](#). At CTCA at Midwestern, nursing staff developed a nurse-driven aromatherapy protocol, including hand massage and aromatherapy for patients. Even though the protocol was designed for patients, nurses report the practices help them slow down and recharge as well.

### Adequate breaks help patients

After CTCA at Midwestern implemented these break room changes in addition to an ongoing focus on employee engagement, patient satisfaction scores were higher and the organization received the prestigious Guardian of Excellence award from Press Ganey. Plus, Lesniak points out that nurses need to be role models in practicing self-care so that they can teach healthy habits to patients.

### Time for renewal

The amount of time nurses get to step away isn't as important as how they use it. "We need to rethink the definition of break time," says Lesniak. Caring for patients isn't like working in a factory where everything is timed perfectly. A nurse's role is intense and unpredictable. The same healing environment available to patients needs to be felt by the nursing staff as well. Consider taking a break outside. Researchers have concluded that "taking daily work breaks in an outdoor garden may be beneficial in mitigating burnout for nurses working in hospital environments." Learn more [here](#).

**The bottom line** — Restorative breaks help nurses better serve their patients, families, and communities.

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