



# TAKE A BREAK - TAKE CONTROL

*(The New Science of Ultradian Rhythms)*

*The 20 Minute Break: Using the New Science of Ultradian Rhythms*

Jude LaClaire, Ph.D., LCPC • Originally published in KC Wellness Magazine

*Get a life - get a grip*

*Get away somewhere, take a trip*

*Take a break - take control*

*Take advice from someone you know - Twain/Lange, "Come on Over"*

**IN THE SONG, "COME ON OVER,"** Shania Twain invites listeners to take a break, make a wish, be happy or take a trip. This is great advice for everyone. The question is, "How often do you take a break?"

You may be waiting for the weekend, for that vacation next summer, for the holiday break. If you are a long-range planner, you may be waiting for your retirement. The problem is that when these long awaited breaks arrive, you may be too tired, sick or moving too quickly for the time to be restful; a true body-mind break. Vacations often cause more stress than your everyday life. Experiencing a change of schedule, sleeping in a different bed, being in unfamiliar surroundings and eating strange food may cause more stress than it cures. So, how can you get a real break?

In *The 20 Minute Break: Using the New Science of Ultradian Rhythms*, Ernest Rossi, Ph.D., a psychologist, author and lecturer, gives us information that could be life-transforming. I first attended a seminar with Dr. Rossi over a decade ago. He introduced me to this amazing cycle that is called the ultradian rhythm. I originally thought that the body-mind had only one basic cycle or rhythm. This is the circadian rhythm; the 24 hour wake/sleep cycle. In the 1950's it was discovered that, when sleeping, people experienced 90-120 minute alterations of dreaming and deep sleep. Researchers observed that when people's eyelids flutter, indicating rapid eye movement (REM), they were often dreaming. It was then theorized that about 20 minutes of every 90-120 minutes each night is spent dreaming.

About twenty years later, in the 1970's, researchers began

to uncover the fact that this 90-120 minutes mind/body cycle occurs night and day. They named this rhythm of the brain-body the ultradian rhythm. You may notice that you can work for an hour or so, with an energetic mental and physical alertness. Your skills, memory and learning ability seem to be at a peak for dealing with the world around you. Rossi calls this the "Ultradian Peak Performance Period."

Then, you may find your attention wandering. You may yawn, doodle, want to stretch, become absent-minded, get a far away look in your eyes, take deeper breaths, become aware of hunger, want to go to the restroom, feel sleepy and just generally "space out." You are experiencing the "Ultradian Stress Syndrome" and your body-mind is asking for a break.

At this point, you may drink a cup of coffee or a caffeinated soft drink, eat sugar or some other food. You might talk to a colleague or, if you are a very diligent worker, you tell yourself to "pay attention" and try to get back to work. Much of the time, due to the high-speed nature of this culture, you will probably override this cycle and continue your activity. What would be the advantage of recognizing this cycle and taking a break? What are the consequences if you override this cycle and push your body-mid to keep going?

If you respond to the "stress" signals and take a break, your brain-body cycles will go into the "Ultradian Healing Response." This phase of the ultradian rhythm "signals fundamental patterns of communication between mind and body that coordinate many physiological and



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*(continued)*

psychological processes a dozen times each day.” (P.13, The 20 Minute Break) This is the window of opportunity for the mind, body and psyche to regain balance and health. You are in an expanded state of consciousness, ready to problem solve intuitively, renew and refresh yourself, transform stress to health and inefficiency to productivity.

If you ignore this cycle you will be at risk for stress-related health problem like headaches, backaches, stomach or digestive problems, asthma, high blood pressure and skin problems. You may create or exacerbate depression, anxiety, loss of self-confidence, memory loss, mood swings, tendency to cry, anger, impatience or addictive behaviors (food, alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, biting fingernails, pulling hair, etc.). You may find yourself being more clumsy, missing social cues, misunderstanding people and, finally, having trouble falling asleep, or waking up feeling tired after a night's sleep.

Are you convinced yet? Maybe Shania Twain and Dr. Ernest Rossi have something in common. They are both suggesting that it is healthy and to your best advantage to pay attention to the natural call of the body-mind to experience the Ultradian Healing Response.

You can implement this new information by learning to be aware of the cycles. The first stage is to recognize the signals the body-mind is sending you to say, “take a

break” (see par 5 above). Begin taking deep breaths into the diaphragm. The deep breathing assists you in moving from the “stress cycle” to the “ultradian healing response.” As you become more relaxed, let yourself drift, float; just enjoy the feeling of rest and rejuvenation. Each person experiences this cycle in his or her own way. You may drift into memories, plans for the future, day-dream, have a “blank mind” or experience feelings and sensations more deeply. The most important thing is not to be “doing” something. You are resting!

Experiencing the rest cycle of the ultradian rhythm, you are ready for the “ultradian peak performance period.” Many people have jobs or responsibilities that would not permit a 20-minute break. Taking a 3-5 minute break, breathing deeply, letting the body-mind relax and rest, would do wonders. Try it and see what happens. You may want to sing along with Shania Twain, Pull up a seat - take a load off your feet Come on over - come on in. You can unwind - take a load off your mind...take a break - take control

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