

An intervention study about the effects of lunch time park walk and relaxation exercise on vitality, fatigue and restoration

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Objective: Lunch breaks are the most common and longest within-workday rest periods. Still, it is unclear whether and how lunch break activities affect recovery from stress and well-being.

Methods: We conducted an intervention study with 153 knowledge workers (83 in the spring and 70 in the fall) who were requested to engage in different lunch break activities for 15-minutes daily for 10 consecutive working days. Participants were randomly assigned to three experimental conditions: 1) park walk (N = 51), 2) relaxation exercise (N = 46) and 3) control (N = 56). Vitality, fatigue and restoration during lunch breaks (relaxation, detachment and enjoyment) were measured with paper-pencil and SMS questionnaires before, during and after the intervention period.

Results: On average, park walk/relaxation exercises were completed on nine out of ten intervention days. During the intervention days, both experimental groups (i.e., park walking/relaxation) reported lower levels of tension after their lunch break compared to before. In the spring group, vitality, fatigue and restoration during lunch breaks remained relatively stable across the intervention period. In the fall group, the intervention had positive effects on all three outcomes.

Discussion: The intervention had positive effects on well-being, especially immediately after the lunch break and in the following afternoon. The intervention period may be too short to produce long lasting changes in well-being. It is unclear why the same interventions have different effects in spring and fall. By combining knowledge from work- and environmental psychology in an intervention study, we broaden our understanding of work stress recovery in general and features of optimal lunch break recovery in particular.