



Health *InSight* Management Bulletin

The **POMODORO** technique or the art of taking control of your daily routine

- Does your list of tasks keep getting longer?
- Are you constantly being interrupted by the phone or by your co-workers?
- Do you feel pressure to read and answer your e-mails immediately?

Workplace health experts agree that we are living in a world where we never have enough time... as soon as a task is completed, several others are already waiting! As a result, we often put off a 5-minute break to grab a cup of coffee, or worse, tend to our essential needs.

Well, it's time to take a break and read this article from our Health *InSight* manager entitled the **POMODORO** technique can help you!

The **POMODORO** technique at a glance

HOW TO CONCENTRATE
ON A SINGLE TASK FOR MORE
THAN 20 CONSECUTIVE MINUTES?



Pomodoro is the Italian word for "tomato." This "tomato timer" is the symbol of the **Pomodoro** technique, an easy approach to more productive time management.

The philosophy of **POMODORO**

In his seminal work, *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*¹, Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi presents his theory that individuals are happier when they are in a state of flow, when they are completely absorbed or concentrating on a single activity. These moments occur when the body or mind are used at full capacity to voluntarily carry out a difficult and important task. The optimal experience is therefore something we can provoke. The objective of the **Pomodoro** technique is to take control of your time at work to reach this state of mind by working on only one task at a time.

¹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 2004).

The objectives of the Pomodoro technique	Required materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease stress related to lists of things to do that keep getting longer • Strengthen focus and concentration by eliminating interruptions • Improve decision-making and prioritizing • Increase and sustain motivation thanks to the impression that you're working faster • Refine and improve the way you estimate the effort required for your tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A timer, e.g. "tomato timer" • A lined sheet of paper with a list of tasks to do today • A lined sheet of paper with a task inventory • A list of various activities (uncategorized)

A day in pomodoro mode

A **Pomodoro** is an indivisible and uninterrupted 25-minute work period, followed by a break of 3 to 5 minutes. It is the measurement unit used in this technique. A **pomodoro** is indivisible; there is no such thing as a **half-pomodoro**. A day spent in **pomodoro** mode is therefore the sum of many **pomodoros**.

The method in three steps

What	When	How
Plan	At the start of the day	Decide on the activities for the day <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using the Activity Inventory sheet, choose the tasks that are the most important to complete during the day 2. Write the important tasks on your To Do Today sheet. 3. For each task, estimate the time required to complete it out by cutting it into blocks of 25 minutes (Pomodoro) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For each block, draw an empty square at the left of the task. For example, a task that requires three Pomodoros should have three empty squares.
Execute and monitor	Throughout the day, repetitively	Collect the data on the effort it took to complete the tasks and on the interruptions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set your timer for 25 minutes and start it. You can now begin your work, concentrating on a single task. 2. When the alarm rings, the Pomodoro is over. You must stop working, even if there are only 3 minutes of work left to do. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If your work was interrupted for more than 30 seconds, the Pomodoro must be considered cancelled because it is not an uninterrupted block of work. - If you were not interrupted, you can draw an "X" in one of the empty squares that appear on your list. The task may not have been completed but you spent 25 intense minutes concentrating on it. 3. Take a break. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After drawing the "X", take a break of 3 to 5 minutes. This break gives your brain time to assimilate the information from the previous Pomodoro and allows you have a glass of water or stretch out. - Working on other tasks during your break is not recommended. 4. At the end of your break, put the timer back to 25 minutes and start another task. 5. After 4 Pomodoros, take a longer break (15-20 minutes). This is the time for coffee, water, cleaning your desk or reading your e-mails. During this break, it is important not to take on a complex task. 6. If the task is completed, strike it from your To Do Today sheet. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If you have planned 4 Pomodoros for this task and you completed it in 3, congratulations! you have worked faster than planned. You will have an empty square next to this activity, leave it blank. - If you have planned 4 Pomodoros and you completed the task in 4, it's also good, you estimated accurately. - If the task is not completed and you did not plan enough Pomodoros, don't be discouraged! You can just plan the right number of Pomodoros the next time!
Save, process and view	At the end of the day	Compile the data on the Pomodoros and interruptions during the day, make it clear and organized to make improvements easier.



In short

- At the beginning of the day, choose the tasks you need to do.
- Estimate the number of 25-minute periods each task will require.
- Start your 25-minute timer and do the task that is the most important and urgent on your list.
- Work on that task until the timer rings. Once your 25 minutes are up, you can put an X at the right of the task.
- If you receive an e-mail or if the phone rings, ignore them and answer them later.
- If a co-worker comes to ask you a question that requires more than 30 seconds of your time, ask if it can wait until after your 25 minutes are up.
- Take a 3- to 5-minute break after each task.
- After 4 blocks of 25 minutes, take a longer break.

Types of interruptions and how to manage them

The following table will help you better understand the different types of interruptions and how to manage them. Also, you can find tricks to significantly reduce these interruptions and still remain a good co-worker.

	INTERNAL interruptions	EXTERNAL interruptions
How to they come about?	Generated by your brain or something that is written around you	Generated by persons or events around you
Examples:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I just remembered, I have to call Mr. X" • "Uh oh, I forgot to write this e-mail" • You browse the Internet to find something related to a specific task but another unrelated link attracts your attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your telephone rings • An e-mail arrives and you receive the notification • A co-worker comes into your office needing help
How to deal with these interruptions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write them down! That way, you can complete those tasks when the current one is finished • Continue the task that was in progress before the interruption • Try to manage them in a few seconds • If the task is urgent, you can interrupt the Pomodoro and start it over later. 	<p>E-mails:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disable the e-mail notification function <p>Telephone calls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These can be redirected to your voicemail, which is ideal, and you can listen to your messages at the end of the Pomodoro <p>Co-workers, in a cordial and collaborative way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell them you have a task in progress • QUICKLY negotiate a deadline (if not urgent) • QUICKLY plan a time to meet with your co-worker

Internal interruptions can represent tasks that you have forgotten to plan. As such, it is important to take these into account the next time to create a plan for this same task. The number of external interruptions may be useful in changing some of your team's working habits. The idea is to encourage teamwork but to structure it by asking that your co-workers respect the 25-minute periods of focused work.

Frequently asked questions

When to read your e-mails?

Plan 1 or 2 **Pomodoros** per day; one at the end of the morning and one at the end of the afternoon. While there are several tools to manage e-mails, disabling e-mail notifications is a step in the right direction. Also, planning the time to process your e-mails is also a good way to manage your daily workload.

When to return your calls?

Returning calls can be managed the same way you manage your e-mails. However, if your work includes answering phones (for example in a call centre), the **Pomodoro** is not appropriate for your type of work.



Conclusion

As a Health InSight insurer, we are conscious of the various realities that affect your daily life, both at home and the workplace. We hope that our Health InSight Management Bulletins offer you useful tips to make your daily life easier, find a balance and the time to breathe. We have a choice: endure a demanding work phase or give ourselves strategies to adapt, encouraging balance and taking into account the demands of each of our jobs. Several trials on the **Pomodoro** technique lead us to believe that in addition to completing the tasks planned on a given work day and managing a host of interruptions, you will be able to take several breaks in what can often be a very intense day. That's Health *InSight* for you... it's beneficial to all!!

Did you ever think that a tomato could help you take control of your daily life?

This article is a summary of the technique, to find out more...

Official Web site of the **Pomodoro** technique <http://www.pomodorotechnique.com>

List of things to do today <http://www.pomodorotechnique.com/products.html#pomodorotodo>

Task inventory <http://www.pomodorotechnique.com/products.html#pomodoroinventory>

One-page summary of the technique <http://www.pomodorotechnique.com/products.html#pomodorocheat>



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