

How to manage productivity dips following the festive season

It's no surprise that January and February weigh in as the least productive months of the year with most South Africans still stuck in a post-holiday slump, which can last for several weeks.



© Andriy Popov – [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

Abdurahman Kenny, Mental Health Programme Manager at Pharma Dynamics says its common for employees to suffer from a dopamine low as they struggle to get back into the work routine after the highs of the holiday, but that there are ways to make the mental transition easier.

“It should be comforting to know that everyone is affected by seasonal productivity dips which occur throughout the year, and even during the week and at certain times of the day.”

Studies have shown that work productivity starts picking up in March, while overall October tends to be the month during which the highest percentage of tasks are typically completed. January ranks as the least productive month with February following closely behind.

Kenny says we complete most of our tasks at the start of the week with productivity waning towards the end of the week. Our mornings are the most productive up until 11am and then we start to taper off after lunch. From around 3pm many struggle to focus and we start paying more attention to Facebook posts, text messages and welcome conversations with colleagues. By the time the clock ticks over to 4pm our energy levels have plummeted.

Tips to powering through the afternoon

“We have mental ebbs and flows throughout the day that is regulated by our circadian rhythm – a natural, internal process that regulates the sleep-wake cycle every 24-hours, which impacts our energy levels and mood. Other factors, such as not getting enough sleep, what we had for lunch, stressful deadlines in the morning or back-to-back meetings may all contribute to the mid-afternoon slump.

“Glucose plays an important role in our mental performance and decision-making ability. When our willpower is low, we tend to choose the path of least resistance, which explains why we’ll rather choose to connect with a friend on social media than working on a report or presentation. To sustain willpower and energy levels throughout the day, consider a lunch with a low glycaemic index, such as vegetables, fruit, cheese, lean meats, hardboiled eggs, seeds and nuts etc.

“Napping for between six and 10 minutes in the afternoon has also shown to restore cognitive function, so if you feel you simply can’t stay awake anymore, power down for a few minutes during lunch, but not too long or else you’ll feel groggy.”

Research published in the Neuroscience Journal proves that even just a 20-minute walk can improve cognitive performance. A burst of high-intensity exercise is best for reducing stress and anxiety.

Kenny says fitting in a walk or a quick gym-session during lunch will recharge your brain and release feel-good endorphins that will ensure that you finish the day strong.

Working in “sprints” or chunks of time, whether it be an hour or 90 minutes, followed by a 5-minute break is also advised. Listening to music while working, changing up your usual routine by taking a different route to work or scheduling fun things to do after hours could also help keep you mentally motivated.

Avoiding burnout

“The key is not to try fight against these natural dips in productivity by crushing a 10-hour day at the office day after day. This strategy will only lead to burnout and heightens your risk of depression.

“Being less productive during certain times of the day or seasons doesn’t make you an unproductive person, however by paying closer attention to these natural cycles and how it affects you will help you to establish certain rituals and routines every day that will help move you towards your goals – turning it into an advantage rather than an Achilles heel,” says Kenny.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>