

Everything Wellbeing: Rest, Breaks & Recovery

Reading Time: 4 minutes

Welcome back to another Everything Wellbeing post.

Today, let's talk about something that often falls to the bottom of the priority list when things get hectic: **rest, breaks, and recovery**.

TL;DR

- **Take your breaks** — you're entitled to them under the Junior Doctor Contract.
- **Don't feel guilty** — breaks help you function better and keep your patients safer.
- **Plan your breaks mid-shift** and coordinate with your team for cross-cover.
- **Help your colleagues rest**, especially if you're the senior on shift.
- **Use exception reporting** if you can't take a break — it exists for a reason.
- **Book annual leave early** — it protects your rest time and lets you plan life outside work.
- **Recovery isn't a luxury** — it's essential for preventing burnout and staying well.

Scroll down for the full breakdown and tips 🙌

The Problem: We're Not Great at Taking Breaks

Let's be honest — as doctors, we're not the best at taking breaks during shifts. But here's a gentle reminder: under the **Junior Doctor Contract**, you're entitled to regular breaks.

Here's how it works:

- 🕒 If your shift is over **5 hours** – you get **1 x 30-minute break**
- 🕒 If it's over **9 hours** – you get **2 x 30-minute breaks**
- 🕒 If it's over **12 hours** – you get **3 x 30-minute breaks**

These breaks aren't a luxury, they're a necessity. Personally, when I skip breaks, I get hangry, lose focus, and become less effective. I make more mistakes, and everything feels harder than it should.

Sound familiar?

Breaks Help You and Your Patients

Taking a break isn't just for your own benefit; it's for your patients, too. A rested doctor is a **safer doctor**. And if I were on the receiving end of care, I'd want the person treating me to be clear-headed and not running on adrenaline and coffee alone.

Seniors — Help Your Team Rest

If you're the senior on shift, try to make sure your team gets their breaks. On night shifts, I like to map out break times for the whole team at the start. That way, everyone knows when they're getting downtime, and the department stays safely staffed.

You might have your own system, and that's totally fine. Just make sure your colleagues are looked after too.

Can't Take a Break? Exception Reporting Exists

If, for some reason, you're unable to take your break, don't just let it slide. That's exactly what **Exception reporting** is for. Every trust has its own process, so make sure you know how it works where you are.

It's not about blaming anyone. It's about making the system safer and more sustainable for everyone.


Ditch the Guilt — Take Your Break Guilt-Free

We've all felt it:

“How can I stop when the department is so busy?”

But the truth is, **it'll still be busy whether or not you take your break**. The difference is, if you eat something, take 30 minutes to reset, and come back refreshed, you'll handle the pressure much better.

Of course, if you're managing a sick patient, that comes first. But otherwise, try not to delay your break until the end of your shift. Aim to take it midway through, and make a quick plan with your teammates to cross-cover.

 Always let your team or senior know when you're going; communication is key.

Planning Ahead: The Power of Annual Leave

Let's talk about another pillar of recovery: **your annual leave**.

Here's my best advice: **book it early**. Ideally, at the start of your rotation, whether it's a 4- or 6-month post.

Annual leave isn't just a reward — it's a vital opportunity to rest, reset, and reconnect with life outside of work.

I've been caught out by leaving it too late and losing out on leave altogether. Not fun.

Why Early Booking Works

Booking your leave early helps you:

- Plan holidays, weddings, or family events
- Schedule courses or study leave
- Carve out time for rest, hobbies, or travel
- Avoid the frustration of fully-booked rosters

My wife and I usually sit down with our rotas at the start of each rotation to plan our time together.

If your plans change, you can always **adjust** your leave later. But if you never book it at all, you risk losing it.

Final Thoughts

Our jobs are physically and mentally intense — and that's on top of family life, exams, studying, and other responsibilities.

The **GMC survey** continues to highlight burnout among resident doctors. That's why **Rest and recovery** are all the more important.

So please, look after yourself. Take your breaks. Use your leave. Rest well, so you can come back stronger and keep doing what you do best.

And as always, remember to ***take great care of yourselves so that you can take great care of others***

Regards

Junaid

Your friendly neighbourhood Wellbeing fellow

