

The Role of Rest in Healthy Living

“Down time” is a key part of a healthy lifestyle in ways big and small, and yet for many people it’s become harder to take time away from work and family responsibilities than it is to eat right or exercise. The technology that gives us the freedom to work from everywhere brings with it the reality that we have the “freedom” to work *all the time*, even though we know that we can be more productive if we take time to rest and recharge. As we think about living a more healthy life, we need to be intentional about making rest – over and above getting enough sleep – a part of our lifestyle. This is true daily, weekly, annually, and over the lifespan.

- Daily – Whether it’s prayer, meditation, creating art, listening to a stimulating talk, or a good walk, taking time at points in the day to unplug from work responsibilities is critical, and takes only the discipline of creating a new habit. Think through your daily routine and identify some points where you can take a few minutes for yourself. For many, it’s when they first get up or just before they go to bed, when they reflect on the past day and prep for the next one. Others create a lunchtime routine that gets them away from their workspace and allows them to unplug. Try several different things and see what works best.
- Weekly – Although my personal technology choices have evolved several years ago I instituted a “Blackberry Sabbath” – one day each week when I didn’t turn my smartphone on at all, didn’t check e-mails or social media. I’ll be honest – it can cause a little anxiety if you’re someone used to always being connected – but it enabled me to be more fully present with my family in ways that they noticed, and I found that there was seldom anything critical that I missed out on.
- Annually – We tend to think about summer as a time for vacations, particularly for families with children freshly out of school for a bit. Whether you go across the country for a week or across town for a day, taking time away as a family or with friends can be a great way to recharge. In addition, many faith traditions emphasize the importance of “retreats” – time spent away from everything in solitary or small group reflection. These don’t have to be fancy, or even formally structured; just having a day to yourself to reflect on what’s going well and what isn’t and developing plans for your future can be very refreshing as well as productive.
- Lifespan – Americans historically think of retirement as one extended vacation, a permanent down time. But Baby Boomers are rethinking that concept, and with good reason. Whether financially, socially or psychologically, more people hitting traditional retirement age are continuing to work, changing careers, starting new businesses or beginning new volunteer adventures. They realize that rest is important, but even it requires moderation. Continuing to be active is a key habit toward healthy aging.

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