

## SEVEN TYPES OF REST

*This post is part of TED's "How to Be a Better Human" series, each of which contains a piece of helpful advice from people in the TED community.*

*This post was adapted from the TED talk by Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith*

### **Have you ever tried to fix an ongoing lack of energy by getting more sleep — only to do so and *still* feel exhausted?**

If that's you, here's the secret: Sleep and rest are not the same thing, although many of us incorrectly confuse the two.

We go through life thinking we've rested because we have gotten enough sleep — but in reality we are missing out on the other types of rest we desperately need. The result is a culture of high-achieving, high-producing, chronically tired and chronically burned-out individuals. We're suffering from a rest deficit because we don't understand the true power of rest.

Rest should equal *restoration* in seven key areas of your life.

**The first type of rest we need is physical rest, which can be passive or active.** Passive physical rest includes sleeping and napping, while active physical rest means restorative activities such as yoga, stretching and massage therapy that help improve the body's circulation and flexibility.

**The second type of rest is mental rest.** Do you know that coworker who starts work every day with a huge cup of coffee? He's often irritable and forgetful, and he has a difficult time concentrating on his work. When he lies down at night to sleep, he frequently struggles to turn off his brain as conversations from the day fill his thoughts. And despite sleeping seven to eight hours, he wakes up feeling as if he never went to bed. He has a mental rest deficit.

The good news is you don't have to quit your job or go on vacation to fix this. Schedule short breaks to occur every two hours throughout your workday; these breaks can remind you to slow down. You might also keep a notepad by the bed to jot down any nagging thoughts that would keep you awake.

**The third type of rest we need is sensory rest.** Bright lights, computer screens, background noise and multiple conversations — whether they're in an office or on Zoom calls — can cause our senses to feel overwhelmed. This can be countered by doing something as simple as closing your eyes for a minute in the middle of the day, as well as by intentionally unplugging from electronics at the end of every day. Intentional moments of sensory deprivation can begin to undo the damage inflicted by the over-stimulating world.

**The fourth type of rest is creative rest.** This type of rest is especially important for anyone who must solve problems or brainstorm new ideas. Creative rest reawakens the awe and wonder inside each of us. Do you recall the first time you saw the Grand Canyon, the ocean or a waterfall? Allowing yourself to take in the beauty of the outdoors — even if it's at a local park or in your backyard — provides you with creative rest.

But creative rest isn't simply about appreciating nature; it also includes enjoying the arts. Turn your workspace into a place of inspiration by displaying images of places you love and works of art that speak to you. You can't spend 40 hours a week staring at blank or jumbled surroundings and expect to feel passionate about anything, much less come up with innovative ideas.

Now let's take a look at another individual — the friend whom everyone thinks is the nicest person they've ever met. It's the person everyone depends on, the one you'd call if you needed a favor because even if they don't want to do it, you know they'll give you a reluctant "yes" rather than a truthful "no". But when this person is alone, they feel unappreciated and like others are taking advantage of them.

**This person requires emotional rest, which means having the time and space to freely express your feelings and cut back on people pleasing.** Emotional rest also requires the courage to be authentic. An emotionally rested person can answer the question "How are you today?" with a truthful "I'm not okay" — and then go on to share some hard things that otherwise go unsaid.

**If you're in need of emotional rest, you probably have a social rest deficit too.** This occurs when we fail to differentiate between those relationships that revive us from those relationships that exhaust us. To

experience more social rest, surround yourself with positive and supportive people. Even if your interactions have to occur virtually, you can choose to engage more fully in them by turning on your camera and focusing on who you're speaking to.

**The final type of rest is spiritual rest, which is the ability to connect beyond the physical and mental and feel a deep sense of belonging, love, acceptance and purpose.** To receive this, engage in something greater than yourself and add prayer, meditation or community involvement to your daily routine.

As you can see, sleep alone can't restore us to the point we feel rested. So it's time for us to begin focusing on getting the right type of rest we need.

*Editor's note: Fatigue can also be associated with numerous health problems, so please get checked out by your physician if it persists.*

*To learn more about Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith and her work, visit her website: <https://www.drdaltonsmith.com/>*

*This post was adapted from her TEDxAtlanta Talk.  
See more here: <https://www.tedxatlanta.com/>*

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