

Wellness Tips

Rest

“Rest is not for weaklings. Hollowing out space for rest is work. ...It takes courage to rest in the midst of an outcome-driving society.”
– Sandra Dalton-Smith, MD (physician, speaker, and author of *Sacred Rest*)

Burnout and chronic exhaustion are detrimental to health and well-being, and many individuals in care-giving professions experience them at high rates. Rather than boiling the solution down to *get more sleep*, Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith proposes intentionality about the rest you pursue because energy deficits require different forms of restoration.

In her TEDxAtlanta talk, she states “if your definition of rest is comprised of sleeping or lying on the couch binge watching an entire season of a TV series you leave yourself open to chronic exhaustion.” Alternately, she encourages you to examine your day and identify where the majority of your energy goes. From there, she concludes “you can focus your attention on getting the type of rest needed to restore those specific areas.”

Dr. Dalton-Smith emphasizes seven types of rest:

- **Mental Rest** gives your brain a break from the consistent intake of information it receives. Ensure you take short breaks every few hours throughout your day to avoid overtaxing your thinking brain. Slow down and let your attention turn to something other than a task with a high cognitive load.
- **Physical Rest** gives your body a break. These activities can be passive (e.g., sleeping) or active (e.g., stretching, massage) and are designed to restore your body.
- **Creative Rest** is an antidote to the dispassion many of us develop in life, particularly in relation to work. This type of rest “reawakens the awe and wonder inside each of us” and she recommends exposure to art or forms of creative expression which inspire you.
- **Sensory Rest** provides respite from our otherwise “noisy” world. She states: “intentional moments of sensory deprivation can begin to undo the damage inflicted by the overstimulated world.” Eat in silence. Set your phone aside. Close your eyes for a few minutes.
- **Social Rest** is finding solace in our interactions with others and is enhanced when you are in reciprocal relationships with supportive, positive people. Engage with those who fill you up & limit engagement with those who leave you feeling drained.
- **Emotional Rest** occurs when you can freely express yourself, being honest with yourself and others. Being emotionally rested means we feel no urgency to emotionally strive to meet expectations. She recommends having relationships that support your authenticity, which allows you to let go of people pleasing and makes it easier to set limits.
- **Spiritual Rest** is the “ability to connect beyond the physical and mental and feel a deep sense of belonging, love, acceptance, and purpose.” Activities of spiritual rest (like journaling, expressing gratitude, or meditation) are nourishing and restorative because they connect you more deeply with others and yourself.

Being a student of medicine is demanding. You are not able to determine how your time and energies are spent in every situation. That being said, there is opportunity throughout the day, week, and month to choose rest. It may seem daunting to carve out periods of rest in an otherwise busy schedule; however, these moments can start small and build. Is there a minute here, five minutes there, where small changes can be made to promote restful, restorative actions? Just because an action seems small or insignificant, do not discount the power it has to pay dividends over time with repeated practice. Without rest our system breaks down. Preventing or treating exhaustion requires periods of rest. With adequate rest we can flourish.

Beginning April 4th, UI Student Wellness is kicking off their “21 Days to Mindful Ways” program, which includes several opportunities to engage in activities of rest. If you’d like to participate, find more information and the registration link here: <https://studentwellness.uiowa.edu/mindfulways>

If you'd like to view Dr. Dalton-Smith's TEDx talk, you can find it here:

[Saundra Dalton-Smith: The real reason why we are tired and what to do about it | TED Talk](#)

If you'd like to talk with someone about exhaustion and activities of self-care, or for any other questions/concerns, feel free to contact the MSCC to talk with a counselor or schedule an appointment:

Medical Student Counseling Center osac-mscc@uiowa.edu 319-335-8056 1240 MERF

Check out the MSCC Website for past Wellness Tips:

<https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

Remember, life is really hard at times - be gentle with yourself!

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Pronouns: she/her