

THE BIG IDEAS

Life Is Timed

Let's get in rhythm.

Want to Get Depressed?

Watch TV at night.

Active Rest

Mental. Physical. Social. Spiritual.

Naps

Are officially awesome.

Working Out Your Brain

Meditate!

Just Pray

For one minute.

Breathe

Inhale. Exhale. Ahhhh...

Social Rest

Is deeply restorative.

Rest More

Accomplish more.

The Power of Rest

Why Sleep Alone Is Not Enough. A 30-Day Plan to Reset Your Body

BY MATTHEW EDLUND, M.D. · HARPERCOLLINS © 2011 · 288 PAGES

"I used to think rest was a waste of time. I'm a doctor—why rest when you can be seeing patients, teaching, and writing research papers? It took me a long time to figure out that most medical people and far more of the general public have gotten the basic facts wrong. Rest is not a waste of time. It is a biological need—a process for restoration and rebuilding. Rest is not useless but a major pathway to our renewal, our survival. The process of aging need not mean the inevitable decline of a youthful healthy human machine into a rusting, decayed hulk. Rather, we should see aging as a script in which the body experiences, learns, rebuilds, and regrows (including our brains) throughout our lives. We re-create, renew, and reorganize ourselves through the process of rest."

~ Matthew Edlund, M.D., from *The Power of Rest*

Rest.

As the title of this great book suggests, it's more powerful than we may think.

Dr. Matthew Edlund, M.D. is known as The Rest Doctor (check him out at therestdoctor.com). He's the Director of the Center for Circadian Medicine in Sarasota, Florida (sounds awesome) and he's an award-winning expert on rest, body clocks, and sleep.

This book is packed with Big Ideas on how we can optimize our lives by focusing more on the power of rest—not just passive forms of rest like sleep, but "active rest" techniques to restore ourselves physically, socially, mentally, and spiritually.

As The (Good) Rest Doctor tells us: "Rest is powerful. Effective rest can help you succeed by making you alert, whole, productive, and happy. It can also provide meaning, making you and your life both more interesting and more complex. With this book, you can learn the rudiments of rest, techniques that you can take with you anywhere. With a little practice, you can then apply these techniques to work, love, leisure, and spirit. It's time to learn how to rest, to build inner and external strength, to feel healthy and alive, to obtain greater control of your life and consciousness, to get more time to do what you really want to do—and to do more with less."

Let's jump straight in!

LIFE IS TIMED. LET'S GET IN RHYTHM.

"Scientists at Colorado State University studying human genes reported in 2008 that about 98 percent or more of our genes operate according to twenty-four-hour patterns. Life is timed, and sleep, like other forms of rest, also follows circadian rhythms. Circadian rhythms powerfully affect our behavior and our performance."

That's amazing.

98 percent or more of our genes operate according to twenty-four-hour patterns.

"In order to fully know the peak experiences people describe as their best memories, indeed just to heal and survive illness, people need to learn how to rest."

~ Matthew Edlund, M.D.

" Ask yourself this: if you could do less and become healthier, more productive, and successful, would you do it? You can, if you know how to rest."

~ Matthew Edlund, M.D.

Circadian rhythms are super (!) important. If we want to optimize, we need to pay more attention to how we harmonize with the natural rhythms of the world. And there's no more powerful rhythm than our circadian rhythm.

Here's how Dr. James Maas, another sleep genius, puts it in his great book *Power Sleep* ([see those Notes](#)): "It's important to keep your biological clock in absolute synchrony with your daily routine. In this way the hours you spend in bed will correspond with the sleepy phase of your circadian rhythm and the hours you spend out of bed will correspond with the awake phase of your circadian rhythm. The only way to do this is to maintain a regular sleep schedule, going to bed at the same time every night and waking up at the same time every day, seven days a week."

Dr. Edlund beautifully articulates the importance of creating rhythms in our lives. Being attuned to the flow and harmonizing powerfully.

Sleep is a powerful way to do that. (And so is "active" rest—which we'll get to in a moment.) For now, a quick look at TV + sleep.

WANT TO GET DEPRESSED? WATCH TV AT NIGHT.

"A study done at the University of Pittsburgh and Harvard in 2009 showed that the more TV teenagers watched, the greater their risk of depression during the next seven years. More TV also generally means less sleep, and less sleep means worse cognitive function and lower grades. Among adults, late-night TV use is a prominent feature in insomniacs, many of whom eventually become depressed. Another unfortunate biological effect of TV comes from the light emitted by the TV itself. While morning light sets our internal clocks earlier, light in the evening sets our biological clocks later. Television sets put out a lot of light. The effect in many people is to make them stay up later, cutting down on their sleep time and making it harder for them to wake up in the morning."

Want to get depressed? (Or get your kids depressed?!)

Watch more TV at night!!

Seriously.

Watching TV at night is just *not* a good idea if we're committed to optimizing our lives.

TV viewing itself (beyond a limited time frame) is correlated with low moods. TV viewing at night just makes no sense. The intense light and high energy programming jacks us up—cutting into the quantity and diminishing the quality of our sleep which directly affects our mood the next day.

My #1 practice these days is what we call our "digital sunset." The sun goes down and we turn off all electronics—allowing ourselves to attune more closely to circadian rhythms, get a good night of sleep, and wake up feeling more refreshed and ready to hit it.

I realize we're extreme but how about you?

Can you dial in your night-time rituals a tad to optimize?!

(Let's do this! :)

ACTIVE REST

"Active rest is conscious. Active rest is under your control. Active rest is goal oriented and directed. With the techniques of active rest you are about to learn (and there are many more), you will rest your body and mind at will, at your leisure—and for your pleasure. Doing active rest you will be learning the whole time, restoring your body and developing parts of your brain that

"Life should be rhythmic and musical. There should be time for activity and rest, for work and relationships."

~ Matthew Edlund, M.D.

will make future techniques of rest easier to learn and use."

Dr. Edlund talks about the importance of what he calls "active rest"—whereas sleep is a passive rest activity, we can also choose to *actively* rest throughout the day.

The good doctor describes four kinds of active rest.

Mental Rest + Social Rest + Spiritual Rest + Physical Rest.

As Dr. Edlund articulates: "Mental rest means focusing intelligently on your environment in a way that's rejuvenating. Techniques of mental rest give you the ability to obtain calm and relaxed concentration quickly and effectively and to become relaxed and focused anytime and anywhere. Mental rest allows for greater concentration, awareness, and achievement.

Social rest means using the power of social connectedness to relax and rejuvenate.

Spiritual rest is the practice of connecting with things larger and greater than ourselves, which provides fellowship and meaning in life—factors people hunger for like food.

Physical rest, by focusing your body and its simplest physiological processes, provokes calm, relaxation, mental alertness, and surprisingly better health."

The book unpacks key practices on how to optimize each. Let's quickly explore a few of my favorites.

NAPS ARE AWESOME

"Research at Harvard has shown that short periods of daytime sleep—even as short as a six-minute nap—can improve memory."

~ Matthew Edlund, M.D.

"Naps restore you. Even a six-minute nap can improve memory and problem solving. Naps can act as the ideal pick-me-up in the middle of the afternoon or while at work. Winston Churchill always tried to take a daytime nap. Many world leaders take "power naps." Before the industrial revolution, most of the population routinely took naps. Why? Human beings are built that way. As you learned in the chapter on sleep, before artificial lighting from gas or electricity, people normally slept at night and during the day. Our body clocks decree it."

Naps.

Altho, oddly, our modern society looks down on a good ol' nap, they're awesome.

Science and good doctors agree!

Dr. Edlund goes into detail on why they rock and we have a whole Note on the subject by another nap expert, Sara Mednick. Check out the Notes on her great book, [Take a Nap, Change Your Life!](#), where she tells us: "Let's look at the rest of the animal kingdom. Do any other species try to get all their sleep in one long stretch? No. They're all multiphasic, meaning that they have many phases of sleep. *Homo sapiens* (our modern industrialized variety, anyway) stand alone in attempting to satisfy the need for sleep in one phase. And even that distinction is a relatively recent development. For most of our history, a rest during the day was considered as necessary a component of human existence as sleeping at night. As A. Roger Ekirch, one of the few historians to study sleep, put it, 'Napping is a tool as old as time itself.'"

"Napping, as you can tell, is controversial. It should not be. Napping is a normal part of human design."

~ Matthew Edlund, M.D.

And, gotta love Winston Churchill's comments on the power of naps. He tells us: "You must sleep sometime between lunch and dinner, and no halfway measures. Take off your clothes and get into bed. That's what I always do. Don't think you will be doing less work because you sleep during the day. That's a foolish notion held by people who have no imagination. You will be able to accomplish more. You get two days instead of one—well, at least one and a half, I'm sure. When the war started, I had to sleep during the day because that was the only way I could cope with my responsibilities."

So good. I've adopted the practice. I call it a "napitation"—where I start with a little mindful breathing, deeply relaxing my body and go from there. Ahhhhh. :)

Back to Dr. Edlund: “Viewing naps as silly, lazy, and wasteful is shortsighted. Quick, programmed naps can make people feel rested and mentally sharp, improve learning and memory, and if performed in the early afternoon, increase work productivity.”

Remember: No half measures! Well, OK. If you're at an office it might be a tad weird to strip all the way down. Hah. But let's go all in for our daily naps and ignore the people with no imagination as we get at least an extra half a day. :)

WORKING OUT YOUR BRAIN

“Meditators grow their brain. You can't see the change without MRI scans, of course, but different parts of meditators' brains grow larger.”

~ Matthew Edlund, M.D.

“Muscles change with use. Just like everything else. That includes the brain. If you use parts of the brain long enough and repetitively enough, they get bigger. Brain activity leads to anatomic changes...”

Long-term meditators grow bigger, fatter frontal lobes. Frontal lobes are where we concentrate, fix our attention, plan, focus, and do much of our analysis of problems. Even novice meditators grow bigger frontal lobes, with fatter sections of gray matter. One study done by Andrew Newberg of the University of Pennsylvania, who studies the effects of religious practices on the brain, showed that poor recall could be improved by meditation training.”

The #1 active mental rest technique?

Meditation.

We've been spending a fair amount of time on the marvels of modern neuroscience. Check out the Notes on [Mindsight](#), [The Emotional Life of Your Brain](#), [Buddha's Brain](#) and Newberg's [How God Changes Your Brain](#) for more goodness on the anatomical shifts we make in the very structures of our brain via meditation.

It's a remarkable fact (!) that we can change our brains. (Go neuroplasticity!!!)

The question is: Are we engaging in the practices that enable us to do so?

Well... Are you? :)

JUST PRAY FOR 1 MINUTE

“In a world that bombards us with information, the art of selective attention becomes increasingly important. That means that self-hypnosis is a skill you'll want to add to your toolkit.”

~ Matthew Edlund, M.D.

“Just pray for one minute. Pray as you are, and pray as you hope to be. And when you are finished praying, think about yourself. Is your body calm and feeling at rest? Are you feeling a little more hopeful, just a slight bit more joyous? Do you feel that you have connected a little more with others—others who may sense the same needs for the world that you do? Regardless of the outcome, pray. The way our bodies and brains are designed and configured, the act itself may prove enough. Prayer and the attempt at spiritual connection are also forms of giving. In that way they are their own reward.”

The #1 way to rest spiritually?

Pray. Even for as little as one minute.

Close your eyes.

Take a nice, deep breath.

And pray.

If you're out of practice that might be a little awkward at first. But feel into all that is amazing in your life. All that you aspire to be. Connect to something bigger than yourself and pray.

Let's try that now... (Seriously. Take a minute right now to pray!)

... How's that feel? (Amazing, eh?!)

"Breathing, like most forms of physical rest, improves as you practice. It takes a little time. But it's a technique you'll be able to do for the rest of your life, so it's worthwhile getting good at it now."

~ Matthew Edlund

"We want to learn to rest anywhere, anytime, in ways that restore us, calm us, relax us, and make us alert. That means we have to learn how to breathe."

~ Matthew Edlund, M.D.

"When Freud was asked what the two most important things in life were, he gave a succinct answer: love and work. I think he was right."

~ Matthew Edlund, M.D.

BREATHE!

"Five breaths may not seem like a lot, but it is. With those five breaths you've opened up the base of your lungs to better circulation, relaxed your body, concentrated your focus on what your body does in ways that let you both appreciate it and enjoy it, and found a way to rest that literally takes seconds and can be used virtually anywhere and anytime."

One of the top ways to actively physically rest?

BREATHE!

It's seriously magic.

All the great teachers come back to its power.

Kelly McGonigal puts it this way in her brilliant book, *The Willpower Instinct* ([see Notes](#)): "You won't find many quick fixes in this book, but there is one way to immediately boost willpower: Slow your breathing down to four to six breaths per minute. That's ten to fifteen seconds per breath—slower than you normally breathe, but not difficult with a little bit of practice and patience. Slowing the breath down activates the prefrontal cortex and increases heart rate variability, which helps shift the brain and body from a state of stress to self-control mode. A few minutes of this technique will make you feel calm, in control, and capable of handling cravings or challenges."

As Dr. Edlund advises, it only takes a few seconds and can be used virtually anywhere and anytime.

Feeling stressed? BREATHE. In the car driving home? BREATHE. On a challenging call or in a challenging meeting? BREATHE. Hanging out admiring your kids as they play? BREATHE. Getting ready to go to sleep? BREATHE.

Now a good time to practice?

Relax your body. Let go of tension in your face and neck and shoulders. Smile.

Take a deeeeeeeep breath in (say to a count of 4).

And take a nice, looooooonnnggg exhale (say to a count of 8).

Ahhhh...

Magic.

SOCIAL REST

"Social rest is powerful. Social rest increases social connections, which can prevent heart attacks, strokes, and perhaps cancer; promote survival; provide personal meaning; and become simple, outrageous fun that will be remembered for a lifetime. There are many, many techniques of social rest, but many involve social touch, the ability to engage in conversation with someone you know well or want to get to know better. In this chapter you learned how to:

- make a special connection with someone you care about
- visit a neighbor or coworker you'd like to know better
- make quick, useful social connections
- walk with a coworker to lunch
- invite a friend to walk and converse with you in a park
- use sex as social rest."

“Rest is restoration. Without rest, our cells do not reconfigure and regrow, rebuild, and regenerate themselves.”

~ Matthew Edlund, M.D.

Social rest.

It’s huge.

Dr. Edlund walks us through a range of practices we can engage in to optimize our social rest—from walking with a co-worker to lunch to going on a walk with a friend in the park to a little sexy business.

Simple little things that make a big difference when we consciously choose to do them. Social rest is deeply restorative. Let’s make it a practice!

What can you do today to bring some social rest into your life?!

REST MORE, ACCOMPLISH MORE

“In order to live well, we need to rest. We need passive forms of rest, like sleep. We need the time to rebuild our cells and organs. And we need the active rest techniques you’ve learned in this book because they will make us more alert and more effective. Rest more, accomplish more. Rest well, and you give yourself a better chance to live healthier and longer. So recognize that rest is a priority.”

Rest more, accomplish more.

Dr. Edlund has made it abundantly clear: We need passive rest, like sleep. And active forms of Mental + Physical + Social + Spiritual rest to live optimally.

Let’s make it a priority and experience the power of rest!!

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Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

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[Take a Nap, Change Your Life](#)

[Power Sleep](#)

[The Relaxation Revolution](#)

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He’s spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.