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# the slow lane



13 ways to stop rushing, recharge and take back your life

by Chrystle Fiedler

## put the brakes on

**TAKE A TIME-IN** "Time-in is time spent alone, without distraction or a focus on getting something done. Its purpose is the deep renewal that comes from having some solitude," says Abby Seixas, L.M.H.C., psychotherapist and author of *Finding the Deep River Within: A Woman's Guide to Recovering Balance and Meaning in Everyday Life*. "It can be time spent sitting still, drinking a cup of tea, or writing in a journal. Just five minutes a day of pausing like this can make a big difference in your energy level and the quality of your life."

**DECOMPRESS BETWEEN TASKS** The next time you drop off a book at the library, instead of rushing off to your next errand, take a few minutes to browse the new fiction shelf, window-shop or just sit in your car and listen to a song. "Stopping makes life less stressful and more enjoyable," says David Kundtz, Ph.D., author of *Stopping: How to Be Still When You Have to Keep Going*. "You'll feel more refreshed, centered and productive."

**TAKE A NAP** "Napping is our brain's natural restart button. Even 15 minutes of sleep in the middle of the day revitalizes your mind, body and attitude about everything you have on your plate," says Sara C. Mednick, Ph.D., at the University of California, San Diego, and author of *Take a Nap! Change Your Life: The Scientific Plan to Make You Smarter, Healthier, More Productive*. A daily nap reduces stress, aids weight loss, revitalizes libido and even helps improve memory, she says. A recent Harvard University study also showed that people who regularly napped at least three times a week for an average of 30 minutes had a 37 percent lower risk of heart attack than those who didn't. (Please turn to 35)

ALWAYS IN A RUSH? SURE, YOU GET where you're going faster and get that to-do list done quicker, but you can also miss out on the scenery that makes life worthwhile. Try moving into a slower lane. All you need is a little imagination and the desire to enjoy the ride.



## THE SLOW LANE

CONTINUED

## FIND "ME" TIME WHEREVER YOU CAN

"When I wait for meetings at an offsite location, instead of checking e-mail on my Blackberry, I use the time as an opportunity to relax and reflect on my day," says Suzanne Bates, 51, of Wellesley, Massachusetts. "Recently, during one of those moments, I visualized an important next step for my company."

## question the need for speed

**DITCH THE LIST MINDSET** "List consciousness operates on the premise that life will happen once everything is crossed off your to-do list," says Seixas. "You're not focusing on what you're doing now, you're focusing on what you have to do next. In the process you miss out on your life."

To change this, pause in the middle of an activity, take a deep breath and pay attention to what's happening right now. "When we are truly present, we tend to slow down."

## CHECK YOUR INNER SPEEDOMETER

"It's easy to speed up when everyone is whirling around you," says Carl Honoré, author of *In Praise of Slowness*. "It helps to ask yourself, 'Am I doing this at the right speed or am I doing this too fast?' Often, you don't need to rush." You can do a speed-check at work, home, on the phone or in the car. If you find you are rushing unnecessarily, just go back to what you were doing at a slower pace.

**LOWER THE BAR** "When you try to be all things to all people all the time,

you end up raising your pace to meet those expectations," says Seixas. "We need to learn to lighten up on ourselves." If you miss the PTA meeting or don't bake your child's birthday cake from scratch, the world won't end. To take the pressure off, tell yourself, "I'll still be a good person even if I don't return that phone call until tomorrow."

## move into the slow lane

**SAVOR MEALS MORE** When we eat too fast, it stresses the body, causing it to produce an excess of cortisol and insulin, which diminishes calorie-burning, says Marc David, author of *The Slow Down Diet*. It also makes you more likely to overeat. "The (Please turn to 36)

## WEB EXTRA

Learn to relax with yoga. Go to [womansday.com/yogaforeveryone](http://womansday.com/yogaforeveryone)

## live well

## THE SLOW LANE

CONTINUED brain literally demands that you eat more when it doesn't register that its basic needs for taste, pleasure, aroma and satisfaction have been met," says David. Try doubling the time you spend on your meals: If you eat breakfast in five minutes, bump it up to 10.

**REALLY LISTEN** The next time you have a conversation, notice if your thinking is judgmental, distracted or focused on what you're going to say next. "All of these things take you out of the moment and out of deep listening," says Joseph Bailey, coauthor of *Slowing Down to the Speed of Life*. "Instead, calm your thoughts and cultivate a sincere desire to 'hear' what your partner, friend or child wants to say to you." You'll not only connect more effectively with those you love, you'll slow down too. (Please turn to 38)

## are you moving too fast?

- After a long day at work, are you too exhausted to deal effectively with the demands of family and home?
- Do you worry that if one more thing happens, you might not be able to handle it all?
- Is your daily planner booked solid every day?
- Do you get less than adequate sleep on a regular basis?
- Are you behind on any of your bills?
- Do you frequently wish there were more hours in the day?
- Do you need to schedule appointments with your spouse and children?

## If you scored...

**0-2:** Your life is in control—you feel good about how you spend your time, energy and financial resources.

**3-4:** You're going over the speed limit. You still feel in control, but sudden events can cause you to swerve off course.

**5-7:** You're in the fast lane. You feel out of control most of the time. Time to reevaluate your priorities and make changes to simplify your life.

Deborah Taylor-Hough, author of *A Simple Choice*



## THE SLOW LANE

CONTINUED

**TRY A RELAXING HOBBY** Activities such as gardening, yoga, knitting and painting can give you an inner calm that you carry into the rest of your life, says Honoré. Loretta Grace, 37, of Woodbridge, New Jersey, takes a ceramics class at her local library every Tuesday night. "I really look forward to happily painting for two hours. And I have something tangible to remind me of the experience."

**GATHER GIRLFRIENDS** "Being with friends regenerates and rejuvenates you. Ideally, you want to be in a supportive environment where you're not going to feel judged, evaluated or criticized," says Dale Vicky Atkins, Ph.D., author of *Sanity Savers: Tips for Women to Live a Balanced Life*. "So much of rushing is because we're trying to make the grade."

**BUILD SLOW RITUALS INTO YOUR DAY** "We've lost the art of leisure in this turbocharged world," says Honoré. "Things like sharing a cup of tea with someone at a kitchen table, saying 'thank you' or holding the door give life texture and meaning." Cook a meal rather than use the microwave. Instead of watching TV, relax in the backyard with the kids.

**LOOK FOR SAND DOLLARS** "I was walking on a beautiful beach with a friend and we came to a place known for sand dollars," says Bates. "Everyone seemed to be finding them but me. Walking quickly and scanning the water yielded nothing. Finally, I slowed down and stopped. There was a gorgeous sand dollar at my feet. It hit me that this was a metaphor for my life. The best way to get what you're looking for is to slow down and allow yourself to find it." **wd**

## create a "what I did today" list

Many of us have a tough time slowing down because we feel like we don't do enough. This exercise helps to focus on what you've already accomplished, says psychotherapist Abby Seixas, L.M.H.C.

1. At the end of the day, make a list of what you've done. Write down everything you can think of, including things you think don't count, like shuttling your kids around, showering or making a phone call.
2. Read over your what-I-have-done list. Take a deep breath and appreciate yourself.
3. Make this list any time you start feeling guilty or upset because you didn't get everything done. Then put up your feet and relax.



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