

Do you feel rested?

GUILT-FREE UNWINDING IS HARD TO COME BY IN OUR MODERN WORLD. **ADRIANNE WEBSTER** SPEAKS TO THE EXPERTS TO FIND OUT THE BEST WAYS TO GET TRUE, QUALITY REST.

Settling down to read my new book, I'm just getting comfortable when I think, "You know what? This would be better with a cup of tea." Five minutes later and cosying up again with cup of tea in hand, I try to focus back in on the paragraph I was reading — where was I again? — when my phone buzzes. I read the message and then, why not, take a little scroll down Instagram, my friend's just got engaged! I'll just send her a message to say congratulations...

Before I know it, an hour has passed, and I feel more frazzled than when I sat down to 'relax'. Sound familiar?

In the age of constant updates and phone dings, we'd rather do anything than sit with ourselves quietly for a moment. Why do we feel the need to be so occupied all the time?

One 2014 study found that people who were left alone in a room for six to 15 minutes preferred to administer electric shocks to themselves instead of being left with just their thoughts. The findings

showed that people seem to prefer doing something, *anything*, even if that thing is negative and painful.

Which might go some way to show why we prefer to scroll on social media when studies have shown it can make

us feel badly about ourselves. The 2018 study *No More FOMO: Limiting Social Media Decreases Loneliness and Depression* published in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* found that the less people used social media, the less depressed and lonely they felt. Go figure!

Following recent years of a pandemic, political upheaval, climate crisis and a recession, it's no wonder many of us are feeling burnt out and stressed. More than three-quarters (79%) of UK workers have experienced burnout, with 35% reporting high or extreme levels, according to new research.

Bex Spiller, founder of The Anti-Burnout Club (theantiburnoutclub.com), is on a mission to reduce the country's growing stress levels. On spotting the signs of burnout and overload, she says, "Burnout can show up in lots of different ways for people, but the general consensus is that it can make us feel emotionally and physically exhausted. Some warning signs to look out for are apathy and struggling to find joy in things, isolating yourself and feelings of loneliness, feeling overwhelmed and/or helpless, and physical symptoms such as aches and pains, stomach issues, and a weakened immune system."

There's never been a better time to take better care of ourselves. As author of *The Art of Stillness*, Pico Iyer, says, "It's precisely those who are busiest who most need to give themselves a break."

What is quality rest?

So how do we achieve this mythical rest? And I don't mean good sleep — I mean truly resting.

We all know the feeling of doing too much — that horrible, frazzled feeling from spinning too many plates at once and neglecting ourselves. But how do we pinpoint what makes rest 'quality'?

In the book *The Art of Rest: How To Find Respite In The Modern Age*, writer, lecturer and broadcaster Claudia Hammond details the top ten most restful activities based on the largest global survey into rest ever undertaken, completed by 18,000 people across 135 different countries. The Rest Test participants described good rest as being 'fulfilling', 'warm', 'clarifying', 'yearned for' and 'restorative'. They found that, for many, it could involve an exertive activity, like sport — tiring out the body to let the mind take a breather.

The study showed that the most restful activities, in order, were reading, spending time in nature, alone time, listening to music, doing nothing in particular, walking, a hot bath, daydreaming, watching TV and mindfulness.

These things aren't particularly challenging — in fact many of them are things we already enjoy doing on a regular basis. But it's in the focus and appreciation of the moment that we are lacking. How many times have you been on a walk or tried to meditate, only to start running through a mental to-do list in your brain? It can be easy to get carried away with our thoughts and forget to take a moment for ourselves.



According to **The Rest Test**, a study conducted by the University of Durham,

68% of people feel they **don't get enough rest**



On average, having a **higher household income** was associated with having **fewer hours of rest**



About **33%** percent of **people report feeling extreme stress**, and up to **73%** report that stress impacts on **their mental health** »

"If you get tired, learn to rest, not quit."

BANKSY



A good read

Getting engrossed in a captivating read has been proven to be one of the most restful activities we can do. As Claudia says, "Reading emerges in the Rest Test as the activity that is more restful than any other. An impressive 58% of respondents selected it.

"And these same people also seem to have cracked how to live the good life, as they were especially likely to score high on a scale that measures whether a person is flourishing — a concept which combines self-esteem, purpose, meaning and optimism."

It might seem quite contradictory that reading would come out on top of the most restful of activities, as it's not a passive thing to do; often, you have to concentrate quite hard on the story, taking efforts not to be distracted. But once you get into the flow, it can slow the mind and soothe the soul.

You can take things at your own pace, going back to read a section that particularly resonated.



Struggling to switch off?

If reading isn't your bag and you're struggling to find ways to settle the mind, Bex has these ideas. "Often we struggle to switch off because there's a real guilt attached to it. We feel as though we constantly have to be doing something to be 'productive.' However, often the opposite is true. Think about how much more productive you feel after a holiday or a short break. This is because we've given our bodies and minds enough good quality rest that then acts as a reset.

"Try re-framing any rest time you have, away from it being lazy towards something that's extremely productive instead.

"If you struggle with long periods of switching off, then try to integrate shorter rest periods into your days. Set a timer for five minutes and do some stretches or bring your awareness to the sights and sounds around you as a little mindful moment.

"The more you practise these short bursts, the easier it will become to integrate more rest time into your life."

"The more you practise, the easier it'll become."



Karen

"You can't beat yoga. Yes, it's exercise, but the aspect of being totally present on my mat and my practice creates a restful experience. It drains away all stress and tension of the day."

Sarah

"I am married to a farmer, and although I have a very busy working life away from the farm, every Sunday afternoon I walk with him to check the stock. It grounds me for the whole week."

Soo

"I've bought myself an acupressure mat. Lying on a bed of what initially feels like nails might not seem relaxing, but the discomfort soon wears off, and I often wake up half an hour later, having fallen asleep on it. It works for me!"



What do you do to relax?

WE ASKED OUR PLATINUM AMBASSADORS WHAT THEIR FAVOURITE RESTFUL ACTIVITIES ARE.

Vicki

"I do twice-daily meditation, journal, have Spotify playlists that I can dance to, I cuddle and walk my dogs endlessly and schedule time in my working day for mini naps and making lovely lunches."



Juliette

"I find embroidery is helpful as it takes concentration, but on something beautiful and positive. While the creative part of my brain is 'on', I'm restful because everything else fades into the background. Also losing myself in a good book; I have to read, at least a small section, every day."

Julie

"Essential oils in the bath with a glass of wine. Or sometimes a walk to just clear my head." ■

