



WHEN EXHAUSTION OVERWHELMS:

EXPLORING THE 7 DOMAINS OF REST

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People are experiencing less energy to do the things that matter most to them because of sheer exhaustion. Culture wars, political dissention, a challenging economy and many other stressors are impacting our ability to manage our mental and emotional well-being,

There is a different perspective of what "rest" can be for you. Rest is defined as "to cease work or movement in order to relax, refresh oneself, or **recover strength.**"

Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith developed a framework for 7 Domains of Rest and describes seven essential types of rest required to address the "rest deficit" that pervades American culture. Along with preventing fatigue and burnout, rest can play a role in improving resilience to everyday challenges.

The 7 Domains of Rest include:

- Physical Rest
- Mental Rest
- Emotional Rest
- Creative Rest
- Social Rest
- Sensory Rest
- Spiritual Rest



Saundra Dalton-Smith, MD, author of *Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity*, explained the importance of a holistic approach to rest in a 2021 [TED Talk](#). "We've incorrectly combined the concepts of sleep and rest and in doing so, we have dumbed down rest to the point it appears ineffective," Dalton-Smith explains. "The result is a culture of high-achieving, high-producing, chronically tired, burned-out individuals."

Reframing Rest

If you find yourself resistant to rest, it may be helpful to reframe the idea of rest altogether. Rather than a passive act that hinders your progress or productivity, think of rest as an investment in your energy store. “I think about energy like a bank account,” says Wellness therapist, Dr. Natalie Dattilo-Ryan. “When you’re busy, you’re making withdrawals and not many deposits. When you rest, you’re building a diversified portfolio of investments into your account.”

But keep in mind that the focus on productivity, or thinking about what taking a break can help you achieve, can make the experience counter-productive. When you tie rest to an outcome, you create pressure that makes rest less restful.

True rest requires being present in the moment, even when it’s uncomfortable. If you notice yourself feeling bored or even agitated when you disconnect from productivity, give yourself permission to experience uncomfortable feelings. Tell yourself rest feels hard not because you’re doing it wrong, but because you’re not used to doing it.



7 Domains of Rest

Review these 7 Domains of Rest and consider what you want to implement that would help you recover energy in areas that you are lacking or where you feel depleted.

1 Mental Rest

Mental rest is allowing our minds to be quiet and still without ruminating on what needs to be done. Implementing a habit stack of including mental rest before bedtime or at key points in your day when your mind feels chaotic is a great way to improve quality of rest and quiet the mind. Guided meditation, visualization, and mindfulness practice are wonderful ways to access this form of rest.

2 Creative Rest

Creative rest is about experiencing beauty and art within ourselves without using our own creative labor to manifest it. Think spending a weekend in the mountains or in nature, lying on the beach, or attending a live show.

3 Social Rest

Not only introverts need social rest. Being around people all the time means being “on,” which can be draining for anyone. Social rest may mean scheduling fewer activities during the week or spending more time alone to recharge. Alternatively, Social rest can also be when we spend enjoyable time with friends who rejuvenate us, rather than with people who drain our energy. Spending time with relationships that elevate our energy is imperative to well-being.

4 Spiritual Rest

Spiritual rest is how we cultivate personal relationships to achieve something greater than ourselves, which is uniquely defined by everyone's individual spiritual journey. Spiritual rest can also be time to reflect on love, being loved, and being fully seen and accepted by God or a Higher Power.

7 Domains of Rest (cont.)

5 Physical Rest (Active and Passive)

Physical rest is divided into passive and active: Active physical rest requires napping and sleeping; Passive physical rest invites muscle relaxation, stretching, and relieving tension from the body, such as doing yoga or stretching exercises.

6 Sensory Rest

Sensory rest asks us to be aware of the external stimuli that exhaust us (Zoom calls, our phone screens) and to set firmer boundaries to avoid burnout. Sensory rest with smart phones can include setting sleep timers that dim screens, add a blue light filter, and put on the do not disturb feature at a certain time in the evening.

7 Emotional Rest

Emotional rest is the ability to be honest and authentic when expressing our emotions, giving ourselves permission to feel whatever arises without judgment. Therapy, life coaching, or spiritual counseling can support emotional rest, and should be a place where you can experience safe, judgement free expression and unconditional positive regard.

Be sure to discuss what resonates for you with your coach on your next coaching call and think about what **rituals of rest** you would be energized by. You deserve to revive your strength and live a life you love!



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Recently honored as one of San Diego Business Journal's 2025 Black Leaders of Influence, Kristen is also Founder & Executive Director of My Sister's Keeper Success Institute (MSKSI), a nonprofit advancing mentorship for BIPOC girls nationwide. She serves as Committee Chair for Women in NAACP – Southwest Riverside County and Advisory Board Member for Southwestern Law School's Women in Leadership Program.

She is the author of two Leadership Books, **Unapologetic: A New Way to Lead, Live, and Level Up**, and **Sovereign Rest: A Woman of Color's Unapologetic Path to Renewing Mind, Body, and Spirit**.