



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 025 – The Power of Rest
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Welcome to the Athena Wellness podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

Hello, and welcome to Episode 25. Thanks so much for joining me. Today is the last in a series of discussions on more traditional wellness topics. In Episode 17, we talked about the three components of vitality, one of which was rest, an area we give little attention to but has a big impact on our wellness.

Think back to the last time you felt completely refreshed. Maybe you had a lovely evening the night before, slept deeply for eight hours and opened your eyes feeling calm and ready to greet the day. And that feel-good mood didn't dissipate. You moved through your day with energy and in the kind of mood that was both accepting of what the day was bringing and creative in finding solutions.

If you're like me, as amazing as those days are, they're not automatic. And why is that? That's what we'll be exploring today.



Here's what we'll be talking about: Sleep 101 - we'll start with the basics. And then we'll talk about the link between rest and productivity. And lastly, we'll talk about incorporating rest into our days.

So I invite you to sit back, take a nice long breath to ground yourself in presence and let's get started.

01:56

So first, the basics. Truth be told, I'm still figuring out this evening routine thing. I'm great in the mornings - up early, doing all the things that keep me well before starting my day. But at the end of the day, my evenings tend to slip away. And if I'm not mindful, I can get a second wind, which makes falling asleep harder than it should be. Has that struck a chord with you?

Sleep is quite simply defined as the body's daily rest cycle. But its purpose, and why we spend a third of our lives in suspended animation, has long puzzled researchers. But what is known is the need to sleep is just as essential as food and water.

Researchers have proven that sleep is quite a dynamic process. Our bodies repair and strengthen during different sleep phases. While we sleep our bodies are busy fueling our muscles, strengthening the immune system, digesting food, removing toxins, regulating metabolism, supporting hormonal balance and processing the daily activities of our lives.

These functions can be impacted by sleep deficiency, which occurs if we experience poor sleep quality or quantity. At first sleep deficiency can feel like no big deal. We may not be at our best. We can feel distracted or emotional or a little cranky. I know when I'm



experiencing a sleep deficit because my head has that buzzy kinda feeling. And studies have shown that mild but chronic sleep deprivation can have the same cognitive impact as drinking alcohol. If this goes on long enough sleep deficiency can turn into sleep disorder and then the stakes get higher. Eventually your body's defenses against disease and medical conditions get impacted. Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and even depression can result from chronic insomnia.

The list is long of often cited activities that support a better night's sleep. And I'll mention the ones that I find most helpful to support quality rest, along with some things I still find challenging.

The first are the **general wellness habits** of daily physical activity and good nutrition. Exercise and eating well are the cornerstones of good sleep hygiene. Getting sunlight and being active outdoors always helps me sleep well.

Keeping a **consistent sleep schedule** by getting to bed about the same time each evening helps too. I'm up by five during the week, so I try to get to bed between nine and 10 on what I call school nights. But I definitely give myself some leeway to enjoy time with loved ones on the weekends.

Next is keeping a **clean, clear bedroom**. This is a big one for me. In my bedroom, there's a bed, two night tables, and a writing desk with a few of my favorite things on it, including a string of lights that I love turning on in the morning. And that's it. It's really a sacred space for me.

I also tried to stay **mindful of stimulants**. Over the years I've cut my caffeine way down, and I have a bit before noon. And if I drink coffee in the afternoon, it's decaf.



Also, being **mindful of digestion**, I eat my largest meal midday and stop eating solid food by around six-ish. And that gives me a few hours to digest before heading to bed. This allows my body to repair and replenish during the night instead of expending energy digesting a big meal.

Next is being **mindful of temperature**. And this is a recent add. I love the warmth, so it was counterintuitive to lower the temperature in the room at night. But I am finding that 67 degrees Fahrenheit works well for me, which is at the higher end of the recommended 60 to 67 degree range.

Next is **minimizing light**. I recently began shutting off the bedroom night light as well.

And lastly is **inviting calm**. If I feel a little wound up, I will try reading or listening to a meditation or a book audio. And I always try to fall asleep with a few words of thanks and appreciation for the day, and all of life's blessings.

Now onto some of the challenges, which are all related to prioritizing sleep by creating a consistent evening routine. Although I'm getting better, the evening can get away from me, especially during the week. It's not unusual for me to catch up on work admin in the evening. I'm working on setting better boundaries for the evenings and the weekends and I know that will help.

Also, I'd love to tell you that I power down all screens 60 to 90 minutes before bed to ease from technology and the commotion of the day. But as I just mentioned, I'm still figuring that out.



Lastly, I do try to minimize alcohol. But when I do have a drink, I'm mindful that my sleep will be disrupted as the sugar metabolizes.

From a wellness perspective, the amount of sleep we get impacts our food and exercise choices. Without quality sleep, there's a tendency to overeat and choose unhealthy foods, and we can be too tired to choose to exercise. In addition, high levels of stress can impact our sleep. And the less we sleep, the more cortisol known as the stress hormone, our bodies will produce creating an unfavorable cycle. This fight or flight hormone can impact our ability to give ourselves adequate time to recuperate from our daily activities and encourage deep sleep, which is the phase of sleep when the mind and body regenerate, process and detoxify. And a way to consistently reach that sleep depth is through stress reduction.

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While we can't eliminate stress from our lives, we can manage it by minimizing stress. Making healthy food choices and moving the body is a great start. As well as addressing the root cause of stress coming from your professional or personal responsibilities and relationships.

What makes us feel stressed? It's the perception that we don't have the resources to deal with what we believe we need to do. Those resources can take the form of time, money, ability, assistance, and energy.

And here's the link between rest and productivity. It may seem counterintuitive, but the more time you take to rest, the more productive you are and your ability to deal with perceived stress increases. A rejuvenated body and relaxed mind are keys to quality



output. This approach focuses on managing our energy instead of managing our time. And when we do, our focus, mood and creativity all increase.

So it's important to recognize fatigue and have the discipline to stop working and get the needed rest. And then we can return to the task with renewed energy and get more done in a quicker manner by working smarter, and not harder.

Rest is the opposite of work. It's the time we take away from our daily routine to recharge the body and mind. And that time ideally means disconnecting for brief periods of time - from phone, email and the internet. But the benefits of doing this are numerous: less stress, more balanced, deeper relationships with yourself and others, all while building energy reserves to deal with unexpected emergencies should they arise.

All of this sounds easy enough, but I know it can be challenging to put into practice. And speaking from personal experience, you won't get it right all the time. And that's okay. Part of this process is letting go of the need for doing it perfectly.

Here are some things I learned late in my corporate career that helped me ease toward a more balanced approach to the day:

Do your most critical self care activities first thing: I woke up very early, so I had time for a morning routine that included writing, meditating, exercising and packing healthy food for the day. I started my workday feeling refreshed and feeling good that I took the time to invest in myself upfront. And that gave me the capacity to focus on others and the tasks of the day.



Next is **using values to set boundaries**. I was once the employee whose hand went up whenever a volunteer was needed. When I started exploring starting my own business and writing a book while working full time, my priorities needed to shift. I still gave 100 plus percent of my effort to my corporate work responsibilities – that never wavered. I just kept my hand by my side when extra projects were doled out. Taking responsibility for how you spend your time is a real game changer.

And lastly, asking, **“What do I really want?”** I was a constant striver, keeping my eye on the next goal and rarely stopping to celebrate or enjoy what I accomplished. When I stopped to reflect on what I wanted for the second half of my life, I knew I needed to make some changes. And this didn't happen overnight. But it gave me space to find contentment with where I was and then mindfully decide where I wanted to go. I found that with some planning, it's quite possible to step off the treadmill of life and live with more simplicity and joy.

And so this was my takeaway: our energy supply needs to be replenished for us to operate at optimal levels. It's been my experience that we can either mindfully incorporate rest and rejuvenation into our lives, or our bodies will force the issue through stress-related illness that can impact the body, mind and emotions, and even negatively impact our behaviors.

There's a self care assessment that's used quite a bit at the college level to ensure students are taking good care. It was developed in the 1990s to help people work through trauma, but it's a great way to determine where you're focusing your self care and where there's opportunity to expand ways to increase your rest and rejuvenation. And I'll put a link to it in the show notes.



13:50

Now let's talk about incorporating rest into our days. For most of us, we plow through the week with the intention of resting a bit on the weekend. But they can be just as busy leaving us depleted when we begin our work week again.

Poet David Whyte offers this: "We are rested when we are a living exchange between what lies inside and what lies outside. When we are an intriguing conversation between the potential that lies in our imagination and the possibilities for making that internal image real in the world."

I just love that - rest as an ability to support us as we bring our best creative selves into the world.

Relaxation is the gateway to optimal well being. When we relax our blood flow increases, which results in more energy as well as a calm, clear mind. This helps with concentration, decision-making and an overall positive outlook.

Here's some practical ways to incorporate rejuvenation into our days:

The first is the **Pomodoro Technique**. This was developed in the 1980s by a university student who was having trouble concentrating on his schoolwork. So he tried focusing 10 minutes at a time, which worked well for him. He expanded the focus time and utilized a kitchen timer that was shaped like a tomato, or pomodoro in Italian.

He landed on a simple technique that followed this pattern: Set your timer for 25 minutes, focus on your task until the timer rings, take a five minute break. Repeat that



pattern four times and then take a 15 to 30 minute break. And then you can repeat that as often is needed.

Next is one of my personal favorites, which is **walking**. When I worked in corporate I enjoyed the walks to and from my car, taking the long way to meetings, using the stairs, and stepping outside at lunch for some fresh air. Now I work from home and my afternoon walks have become non-negotiable and they add to my productivity and my flow.

Next is **microbreaks**. And that can be anything that increases restoration by disconnecting for a few minutes. If I'm sitting for the better part of an hour, my watch will vibrate letting me know it's time to step away. I get up, I walk a bit, stretch, have a non-work related chat. Other ways to take a little break include stopping to take a few breaths, maybe a moment of silence, a few mindful sips of coffee or tea or water, relaxing your muscles, noticing what's around you, or focusing on an object like a flower or a candle, or simply a moment to express thanks and gratitude.

Next is **clear boundaries**. Set times for starting and stopping the work day, something I'm still working on as I mentioned, and also making sure that you stop for lunch. You can also set boundaries around your meeting schedule or stopping earlier on Fridays. I found that setting boundaries helps me to say no to things that would otherwise distract me.

Next is **restoration through repetition**. If you have a little more time on your hands, a repetitive activity that can distract the logical left brain for a while can provide a much needed mental break. As a bonus, these activities, things like drawing or playing an



instrument or solving a puzzle, also can invite creative breakthroughs. And for me, I would also put driving in that category.

Next is **knowing yourself**. What are the things that can impact your physical, mental and emotional energy? It's important to learn how to plan for things that deplete it and include things in your schedule that boost it. Knowing what lifestyle choices have you feeling your best, things like movement and nourishment, and also knowing what restores your spirit, what brings you joy, connection and the feeling of support.

18:37

Last is **letting go**. Surrendering just for a few minutes thoughts of the past, that to-do list, what can happen tomorrow, and allowing yourself to feel presence, that you're okay right now, a way to put aside what you can't control and focus on what's actually supporting you in this moment.

You can even take this a step further by letting go of the "doing it all, having it all" mentality. And this one takes time and reflection. But it can be very effective in times of change or transformation. Questions like: What do I value? What matters most? How do I want to spend my time? Where am I currently spending my resources? Am I learning and growing? Those questions can be insightful on how to keep yourself rested and relaxed by not doing the things that don't add value to your life.

There's a Chinese proverb that says: "Tension is who you think you should be. Relaxation is who you are."

So take a breath and relax. Start small. Simply invite rest and make space for it with soothing practices. Try any one of these for five minutes at a time and notice how you



feel before and after you do. Appreciate the times when you are able to rest. And over time, you'll start to feel lower stress and higher energy levels, which will also help deepen your sleep at night.

I'd like to close with another quote on rest by David Whyte. He says, "Rested, we're ready for the world but not held hostage by it. Rested, we care again for the right things and the right people in the right way. In rest, we re-establish goals that make us more generous, more courageous, and more of an invitation. Someone we want to remember and someone others would want to remember, too.

Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

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Until next time, be well!