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REST AND

RECOVERY

Whether you are recovering from surgery or illness, or just need some rest and relaxation, these tips will leave you feeling rejuvenated. By **Donna Duggan**

Yogic breathing

Your breath can be an indication of how you feel. People who are stressed or low on energy often have an irregular or shallow breath that only reaches the top of their lungs. Deep, yogic breathing has a calming effect.

Lie on your back, with your legs stretched out and arms by your sides, palms facing up. If this isn't comfortable, place a pillow under your knees. Consciously relax your jaw, throat, neck and shoulders. Take a deep exhalation and feel your breath gently swelling in your stomach. As you exhale, feel your diaphragm release back towards the heart. Try inhaling for four counts and exhaling for up to eight counts. At the end of each exhalation, take a short pause.

Meditation

If you are recovering from a particularly stressful period, regardless of whether the stress was physical, mental or emotional, meditation is invaluable. Researchers have documented both long term and immediate

benefits. Immediate benefits include lowered

blood pressure and increased blood flow, while long-term benefits include improved immune function and pain relief.

Meditation causes changes in the brain, producing alpha waves which help relax the nervous system. It is basically directed concentration and involves learning to focus your awareness on something, such as your breath, a word repeated silently, or an object. Alternatively, it can involve clearing your mind of any thoughts.

For a simple meditation, choose a quiet place and sit comfortably. Try to keep your back straight to prevent your mind becoming sleepy. Sit with your eyes partially closed and turn your attention to your breath. Breathe naturally, preferably through your nose. If thoughts come to your mind, just let them go and return your focus to your breath. At first, your mind may be busy and there will be a temptation to follow the thoughts. But if you keep returning your focus to your breath, eventually your mind will calm down.



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Gentle exercise

When you are in recovery mode, exercise may be the last thing on your mind, but many experts say gentle exercise can help.

Body+soul doctor Cindy Pan says: "Prolonged bed rest is not necessarily a good idea unless your doctor advises it, since it can result in further deconditioning, loss of fitness, muscle strength and tone."

Depending on what you are recovering from, Dr Pan says, "In most cases, returning to fitness following a period of being unwell should include a graded exercise program where you gradually increase your activity appropriate to your age and overall wellbeing. In the past, 'rest' was sometimes considered a kind of panacea, but nowadays it is recognised that prolonged rest can actually be unhelpful or even counter-productive in some conditions and more active approaches are often recommended."

Gentle exercise that can help includes tai chi, walking and swimming.

Exercise not only helps the body recover,

but also your mind. Psychologist Eva Ardstrom says: "The body and mind are intertwined. In the event of injury, trauma or illness, what heals the body also helps the mind. Exercise is necessary to heal both the body and mind as physical exercise helps switch off the hormonal stress cycle."

Additional support

If you feel your recovery is slower than you would like, herbs and supplements can help.

Naturopath Emma Sutherland says St Mary's thistle protects your liver against the side effects of heavy medications, echinacea supports the immune system and the herb gotu kola speeds up wound healing and reduces scar tissue.

"Specific nutrients can support and facilitate your recovery, such as vitamin C, which helps your white blood cells fight viral and bacterial infections, and zinc, which increases the number of white blood cells," Sutherland says.

TOP TIP

Melbourne psychologist Cynthia Hickman says: "When recovering from illness or stress it is essential we give both our mind and our body as much rest as they need. This means we need to take time out from normal duties so our system can process what has occurred. Our body and psyche know how to heal, so we must give them the space to do their job."

