

## Ep #172: The Importance of Rest



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With Your Host

**Maisie Hill**

**The Maisie Hill Experience** with Maisie Hill

## Ep #172: The Importance of Rest

Hi everyone, welcome back to the podcast. This is episode 172. And this week I want to share an episode that was particularly useful for so many of you when it first aired. It's all about feeling lazy, being productive and how to know when you are pushing yourself to your limits. Enjoy.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

Today's episode has been inspired by my lovely new sofa. I've never bought a new sofa before. So, this feels very adult to me. It's like welcome to your 40s. I've got this studio space that I rent and work from here in Margate, but there's nowhere to sit on other than my chair or the floor. So, I decided to invest in a sofa so that I can rest during the day.

As I say that, I do feel this little urge inside to justify having a sofa by saying that it will also be somewhere for me to work away from my desk and my screen. Which is true. I'm sure I will use it for work. But the reason that urge to justify it is related to today's topic of being lazy. Lying down in the day is usually seen as indulgence or lazy. Whereas in some cultures and communities, it's just normal. It's no big deal.

I've noticed that this is a common way for my clients to beat themselves up, okay. Because my clients tend to be ambitious overachievers with perfectionist tendencies, and they're used to pushing past their limits. Okay. That's what they've been doing for years or decades. Just driving themselves harder and harder using stress and perfectionism, pressure, usually a lot of caffeine to fuel themselves. You know this isn't good for your hormones and health, right? It's not good.

Most humans I know tend to go through their days existing in a side of the nervous system that's called the sympathetic nervous system. That's called the sympathetic nervous system. That's the side where you're in fight, flight, or freeze. It's okay for your nervous system to be activated because

## **Ep #172: The Importance of Rest**

that's what it's there for. But we shouldn't be hanging out in it most of the time.

Where we want to be in is the other branch of the nervous system, which is known as rest and digest. This is where you're calm and relaxed. So, you're digesting food because your body's not busy dealing with a real or a perceived threat. By the way, a real threat would be someone actually coming up to you and having a go at you or being physically violent towards you. A perceived threat is worrying someone's going to have a go at you.

So, think about how many of you spend your day worrying about what other people think of you. Because when you're doing that, you're likely in the stress response. It might be low level activation. It might be more than that. But either way it's happening, and this will be having an impact.

When you've been wired to work, socialized to work using pressure and stress in the way that I've just been talking about, the idea of working in a more relaxed and dare I say it loving way is so outlandish to your brain. So wild that your brain will just want to try and save you from that and stop you from doing it. Because remember the human brain seeks out pleasure and avoids pain. That's what it's doing all the time. If you're thinking that working in the less forceful way is somehow ultimately going to lead to being homeless then of course your brain will resist doing this because it wants to save you from that.

This may sound dramatic, using the example of ending up homeless. But I've had this conversation with a lot of my clients. That's the destination that we ultimately get to when we explore what they think's going to happen if they take a break. Okay. They worry about being "lazy" in terms of what other people will think, but there's also this underlying distrust of themselves. That who knows what is going to happen if they just ease up a bit.

Just to put this into context, we're usually talking about taking a very small amount of time off or not working in the evenings or not working every

## Ep #172: The Importance of Rest

evening or not working on the weekends. It's not more than that. But their brain thinks that their life is just going to descend if they do less than what they currently do. They have this story that they tell themselves. That a little break here is going to turn them into becoming lazy, losing their job, and ending up homeless.

Seriously. I can't tell you how many times I've had this conversation with clients. It's clear that there's this inability to trust themselves, which is understandable given how we're socialized. There's this underlying premise that being lazy is bad and working hard is good. Using force and pressure and stress to get something done isn't going to result in your best work.

Some of you are going to have stories that you really thrive under pressure and that you need a deadline in order to get something done. Believe me, I used to believe that about myself too. A belief is just a thought you've had on repeat long enough for it to become entrenched in your mind. Just like any thought, you get to decide if it's kind, if it's helpful, and if you want to keep it.

Taking time to reflect and recharge is necessary. Your body is always going to guide you towards this. If you find yourself struggling to focus and tired, then that's probably your body letting you know that you do need a rest.

Listen. I am skilled at being able to coach myself into anything. When I'm not feeling motivated or inspired or relative, I can create those emotions by myself just by thinking thoughts on purpose that lead to those emotions. In fact, I've got so good at doing this that I actually feel creative most of the time. It's just how I think about myself now.

When I was writing both of my books, I couldn't just rely on my hormones and certain moments in the cycle when I typically feel a certain way. There's just not enough time when you're writing a book to wait around for those feelings to emerge. The same will be true for whatever you're doing in your life.

This was particularly true during the first lockdown in the UK when I was working from home with my family there and had the book deadline

## Ep #172: The Importance of Rest

looming. I just had snatches of time, which meant I needed to summon these emotions for myself. But because I'm so able to do this, I've really trained my brain to create those emotions. I have to also be really aware of my body and my mind so that I can recognize when I'm starting to push myself.

I'm going to talk more about this in another episode, but I wanted to raise it here. Just because we've got to have that awareness. It's not always about like brain hacks and being able to do more. Sometimes it's about stopping and resting, which is what we're talking about today.

Now, when we say being lazy, what we actually mean is resting. This is an important reframe. Because what if laziness isn't a thing? What if we just removed it from the discussion? I think that would be really helpful. The dictionary definition of resting is to cease work or movement in order to relax, sleep, or recover strength.

What I want to call attention to here is that rest is a verb. It is a doing word. It is an active state. We think that resting means doing nothing, but so much happens when we rest. It's only in the last few decades that scientists have actually used functional MRI scanners to demonstrate that the brain is most active when we are resting. Because when you lie down on your back and you let your mind wander, different regions of the brain start to communicate and fire together. Okay.

Research is, I think, it's five distinct resting states. These networks of brain activity that they've identified. One of which is called the default mode network, the DMN. That's just a circuit that fires up when you're daydreaming or just thinking without a particular goal in mind. It's a resting state. When we engage in a task, a different network in the brain is engaged. We move out of the default mode network. So in very basic terms. Please forgive me any neuroscientists who are listening to this. As one network gets switched on, the other network goes off.

Interestingly this is different in folks who have ADHD because the default mode network can remain on when they're trying to complete a task. It

## Ep #172: The Importance of Rest

doesn't fully deactivate, which just causes interference when you're trying to complete a task. Like lapses in attention, for example. Got a bit side-tracked with the geekery there.

To return to the benefits of resting, resting reduces stress. Although if you're resting or supposedly resting but you're spending the whole time thinking that you're lazy or you're feeling guilty for taking time off then it's probably just going to increase stress. So you've got to work on physically resting and managing your mind whilst you're resting so that you can actually rest and get the full benefit of it.

Because when you do that, it's really great for your health. It reduces stress. You move into the rest and digest part of your nervous system. It also boosts creativity, productivity, helps with decision making. All the good things basically. So downtime and periods of rest are necessary.

But rather than seeing resting as a foundational piece from which productivity comes from, the tendency is to see it as something that we get to do once we have been productive. Which is really unhelpful because it positions rest as the treat that we get once we've worked hard.

I get all my best ideas when I'm resting. Topics to talk about with you on the podcast, webinars for the Flow Collective, ideas for my books. They all come to me when I'm out walking or lying in bed, sitting down having a coffee in the morning. Because now that the weather's warming up. I mean it's not particularly warm here today though. But on nice non-windy days, I like to get my morning coffee, sit down just overlooking the beach, and look out to the sea and just enjoy the sense of space in front of me. I love being able to see the horizon.

As I do that, I'm creating space inside my brain as well. Ideas just start to float in. The temptation there is to just grab these ideas and jump in with it and just write a load of notes, but I've learned not to do this. To resist that urge and stay in that spaciousness. I might write down a sentence, a little idea, but that's it.

## Ep #172: The Importance of Rest

So often does your brain have a chance to wander? Have you don't that today? I want you to think about what your brain gets up to when you're in the shower or doing the dishes. Any kind of activity that essentially doesn't require much effort or concentration. That's often when we problem solve without any effort. Ideas and solutions just come to you.

This is why I talk about menstruation as the in the shower moment of your cycle. If we have some downtime, then this is where what's taking place in the whole of the cycle that's just ended can be fully integrated and processed properly. When you do this, it means by the time your period is winding down and ending, you've made sense of a lot of stuff and you can move forward with the new cycle.

I also want you to think about that time just before you fall asleep and as you're waking up in the morning. That in-between time. That's just like the very end of your cycle and the beginning of the next one. What you might be doing, and there's no judgement from me if you are doing this because I've certainly done it too. But how many of you are opening up your inbox and Instagram when you wake up in the morning or just before you fall asleep at night? Think about if that's actually helpful because I'm sure that it's not. How often are you checking them during the day?

As you're reflecting on this, please try and do this just in a factual way. Okay there doesn't need to be any self-judgement here. It's totally understandable why these behaviours have become patterns. In fact, there's a term called cyberloafing. Cyberloafing is when you use the internet, usually at work, to do non-work-related stuff. It's just scrolling basically. Actually, there can be benefits to that. I mean I don't think scrolling is actually downtime, but what I would say is it's a behaviour that suggests a need for downtime. Because human brains need downtime.

Many of us are regularly pushing past our limitations, especially this past year or so. Let's face it. We live in a society that encourages and rewards this kind of behaviour, but it comes at a massive cost. This is something that I've been thinking about a lot as my company starts to grow and I grow my team.

## Ep #172: The Importance of Rest

One of our company values is that we do epic shit without burning ourselves out. That we believe that rest is radical, and that we get more done by slowing down. This is because we're in it for the long run. I'm hiring amazing people. I don't want them burning themselves out. So, we actually have a company rule that says don't check Slack, which is where we do our kind of team communication. Don't check Slack outside of your working hours. If you do, expect to be called out on it. Because I'm really serious about it.

My assistant Beck, whom I love so dearly. She joined me two years ago today. Today is our workiversary. She's about to go on maternity leave, which is amazing. It's the best reason for her to be leaving of course. But we're also going through all the feels together because we've been through a lot personally and professionally during those two years.

Anyways she's in Australia. So, she has very different working hours. The other afternoon at I think it was about 3:30 my time, which is after midnight for her, this alert came through on my phone from Slack that was a message from her. I was about to say, "What the fuck are you doing working at this time?" But then I'd checked the timestamp and realized there'd been a delay between her getting a message and me getting an alert. She'd actually sent it during her work hours. So, it was okay.

This is really important to me. I've been thinking a lot about this, which is also why I wanted to talk to you all about it today. One of my favourite kind of personal strategies that I like to use whenever I feel stressed or pressure to get things done. The first thing I do is cut things from my calendar and have a rest.

I've had this I call it safety mechanism or protective mechanism for a long time. I wonder if it's something to do with being autistic. I'm not sure. Either way it's there. As soon as I start to feel overwhelmed or I notice myself starting to rush, I stop literally and physically. I cancel plans. I lie down. I don't do anything.



## Ep #172: The Importance of Rest

This doesn't happen all that often anymore, but I think it's a great skill to have. Because so many people just push on, and that comes at a cost. Usually a really high one, and that's burnout. It's actually evidence to suggest that the average workday is too long and isn't sustainable, especially once you factor in other commitments that people have. So, it's no wonder that so many of us are burnout.

The problem is that because we're all believing the lie that the way we work is normal and suitable for humans. That if we're struggling to keep up then that must mean there's something wrong with us, but there really isn't. Okay.

So, today's reminder is simply that brains work best when they are rested. You're not being lazy. You're just taking care of yourself and resting. That's all. Humans need downtime, and that includes you. Do you remember your self-worth is not tied to your productivity? I did a whole episode on this. So, check out episode ten if you haven't already.

Okay my loves. That's today's episode. I will be back next week with another.

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