



The Art of Doing Absolutely Nothing and Its Benefits.

Are you truly able to sit back and do nothing for some time, despite daily demands competing for your attention? And are you able to do it without feeling guilty? Congratulations, you have mastered the art of doing nothing and are reaping the many benefits! For others, this might seem impossible or very hard to achieve. And of course, it is! We all have so many tasks to get through, loved ones to look after, global news to stay up-to-date with and, of course, we need to look after ourselves. If it is difficult for you to make time to just do, well, absolutely nothing, read on to learn about the benefits and how you can integrate it into your daily ritual.

Depending on your genetics and how medicine advances, you might have a good chance of reaching 100. For those born after 2000, this new longevity will also mean a longer working life. The three life stages of education, work and retirement no longer applies in the same way. 'Can we honestly assume that someone can work non-stop until the age of 80 – with no breaks, no sabbaticals and no flexibility?' asks Niall Ferguson, author of *The 100-Year Life*. Is it also fair that we are expected to put away 25% or more of our monthly salary to be able to finance a potential 35 years of retirement? I think we need to find a balance and redesign life so that long lives are energizing, creative and fun.

However today, I will focus purely on the fact that there is great value in resting and resetting by simply doing nothing or, as the French say, *ne rien faire*.

Unlike my mum, who was always restless and felt obliged to do something productive like running errands, working in the garden or exercising after work, I believe I have mastered the art of being 'lazy'. One reason for my mum's restlessness was certainly her parent's experiences, as my grandparents had to flee Poland during the second world war. After losing and finding each other again, they had to start from scratch in Germany with two suitcases and two young children.

On the other hand, I was born into the stable, three-stage era during flower-power time. While I recognise that in comparison to many, I had a much easier start to life, I found that despite my life choices and having time to rest, I often still felt quite guilty about my laziness. This notion has now passed, since I understand the benefits it has for my long-term mental and physical health.

Today, many are pushing themselves close to their breaking points. But how long can they keep it up? Since the beginning of our existence, stress, evoked by an actual or perceived threat, will flood our body with a hormonal infusion of adrenaline and cortisol, brought on by our sympathetic nervous system to give us a boost of physical energy and mental focus so that we may confront or run from a predator. Today, the predator is no longer a T-Rex, but your boss, your partner, the traffic, the demands of work and so on.



Normally, our stress-release response would kick in once the threat had passed and we would experience a heightened state followed by a calming effect, thanks to our parasympathetic nervous system. But when stress is ongoing, this no longer works.

In order for us to return to a state of recovery, we need time to rest so that our body and mind can return to a state of calm and restore and form new neuropathways. Over time, [ongoing stress](#) and high amounts of adrenaline and cortisol circulating in our body will have a dramatic impact on our health, career development and relationships. The result could be ongoing anxiety, restlessness, impaired sleep, and an overall feeling of exhaustion, with the risk of provoking a burnout, if not worse.



Research shows that in every moment of our life, our brain regulates the inside of our body, including our organs, hormones and immune system, to keep us alive. The process is like running a balance sheet, but instead of money, our brain budgets water, salt, glucose and other bodily resources as we gain and lose them. Actions that spend resources, such as intense exercise, stressful work or conversations, are like withdrawals from your account. Actions that replenish resources, such as eating, sleeping, connecting with others and resting, are like deposits. Sufficient resting time or short breaks promote mental health, boost creativity, increase productivity, promote wellbeing, reduce stress, improve mood and strengthens relationships.

And while I am aware that not everybody has the luxury of an abundance of free time, I would still like to share some of my tested and proven ideas of doing absolutely nothing. Maybe you'd like to test one?



- Remove your TV and store it away for one to two months. You will gain back so much time.
- Replace one or two rounds of your weekly exercise routines with doing nothing instead.
- Spend time with your partner or a good friend by simply doing nothing in silence.
- Walk or spend time in nature just observing what is around you.
- Sit or lay on the floor listening to music.
- Eat and do nothing except savour the food and the moment.

It's so important to just be there, without a screen, book or podcast commanding your attention. And don't be scared when the noise between your ears gets too loud. Just listen to your chattering mind and observe your mental wandering. Noticing what's happening in your mind when you are not doing anything is a useful step in understanding yourself and your relationships with others.

If the above is too hard for you, start out with one of the mindfulness meditations that are on offer. Though mindfulness meditation is slightly different from intentional mind-wandering, it's still very effective at relieving stress, building self-awareness, and boosting creativity and problem-solving.

Lastly, one of my favourite health and wellbeing boosters is to have a [healthy sleep routine](#). Resting is a fundamental part of your development, health and wellbeing. There are always many distractions and there is always something (or someone) requiring your attention. But no matter what your schedule or task list may look like, resting and unplugging is vital to your long-term health.

And of course, you will make your own decisions, organise priorities and take action based on what is important to you. But for me, in case I receive the gift of longevity, I would really like to grow old with the best possible mental and physical health, and enjoy a long, good quality end of life.

Get in touch if you have questions around learning to do nothing.

Iris – Your Transformational Coach



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