

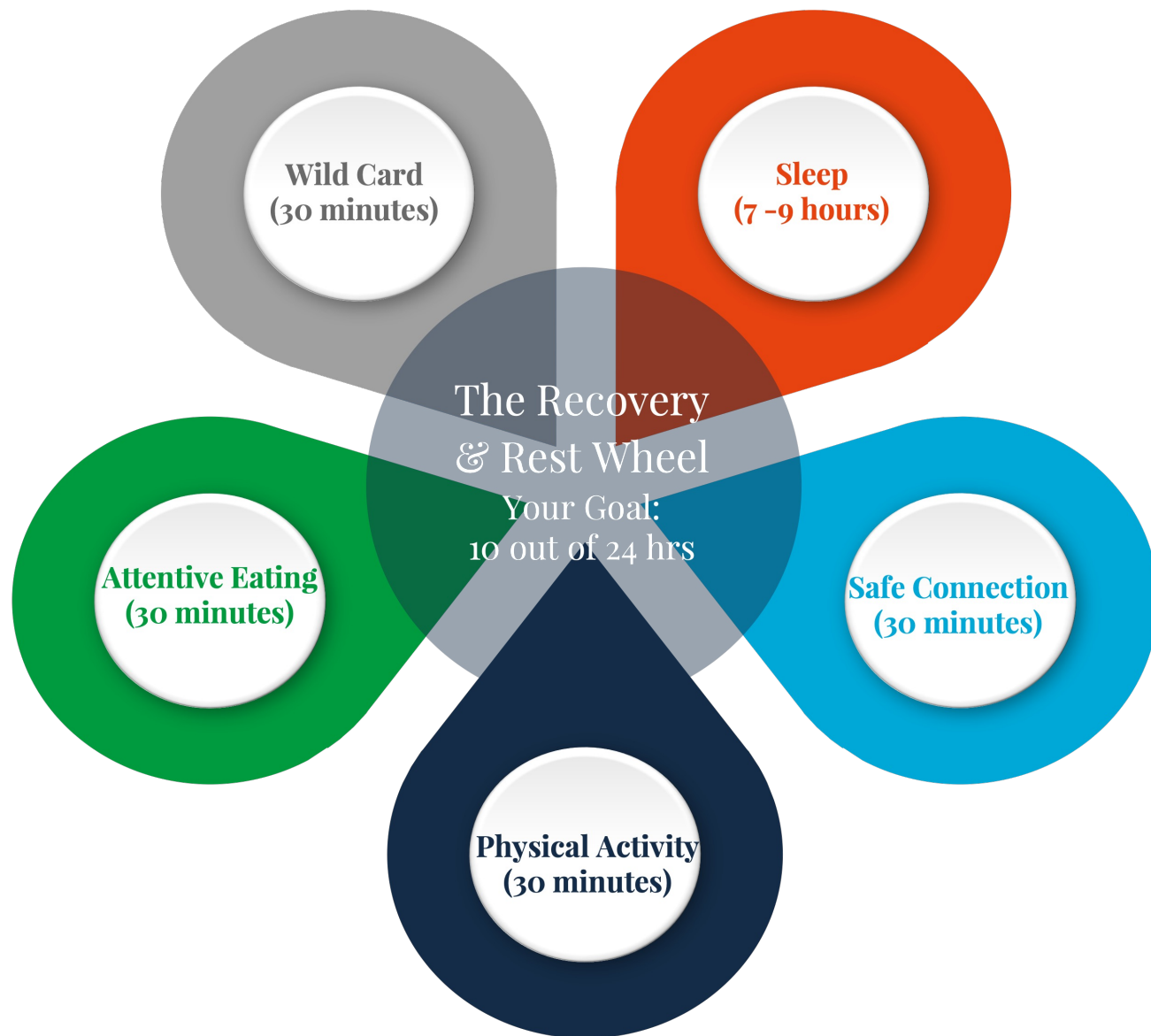


The Power of *Recovery & Rest*

THEWELLBEING**LAB**

A MICHELLEMCQUAID PROGRAM





“Rest is, quite simply, when you stop using a part of you that’s used up, worn out, damaged, or inflamed, so that it has a chance to renew itself.”

Emily & Amelia Nagoski

You are built to oscillate between work and rest. When you allow for this oscillation, the quality of your health, relationships, and work improves. For example, a growing body of research has established that you do your best at any given task for only a limited amount of time, energy, or attention, then your performance drops off, your attention wanders, and your motivation evaporates. But resting after a depleting activity has been found to eliminate the effects of fatigue (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2020).

You’ve experienced for yourself that a muscle that isn’t used will atrophy. And you’ve probably also experienced that a muscle that is worked constantly, without rest, will grow fatigued and eventually fail in exhaustion. And chances are you’ve discovered that a muscle that gets worked and rested and worked and rested will grow stronger.

But how much rest do you need? Studies suggest, your body and brain need on average 42% of your time spent resting. It doesn’t have to be every day; it can average out over a week or a month or more, but approximately ten hours out of every twenty-four should be spent resting.

What qualifies as rest? Emily and Amelia Nagoski in their book *“Burnout: The Secret To Unlocking The Stress Cycle”* suggest the following:

- **Sleep (7 – 9 hours)** – your whole body, including your brain, is working hard as you sleep, to accomplish life-preserving tasks that can be best achieved when you’re not around to interfere. While you sleep your body heals, your memories consolidate into new knowledge and ideas, emotions soften, relationships are improved, and your health is heightened.

- **Stress reducing conversation (20 – 30 minutes)** – finding opportunities to love and feel loved with your partner or other trusted person, is one of the most important ways your brain replenishes and remembers why you are safe.
- **Physical activity (30 minutes)** – helping to transition your body out of a stressed state and into a resting state and improving your quality of sleep, physical activity allows your mind and body to switch gears. This can be done alone or done with others, just try to make the movement joyful rather than punishing.
- **Paying attention to food (30 minutes)** – think of this is as nourishment and active meditation. It includes all meals, shopping, cooking, and eating, and it doesn’t have to be all at once. It can be with people or alone, but it can’t be while working or driving or watching TV or even listening to a podcast.
- **Wild card (30 minutes)** – this could be a trigger for meditative travelling time, social play time, creative expression, extra physical activity, mindful cleaning, a bedtime routine or anything that allows your default neural network to come online and your brain to wander. Mental rest is not idleness; it is the time necessary for your brain to process the world.

These are just averages, and as you can see, you’ll sometimes do more than one thing at a time. If you’re thinking, “I can get by with less,” Emily and Amelia point out that you’re right. You can “get by,” dragging your increasingly rest-deprived brain and body through your life, and there will be periods when adequate rest will not be an option. But no one who cares about your well-being will expect you to sustain that way of life for an extended period of time.

Your Recovery & Rest Kit

Feel It To Heal It



Release The Tension

Watch a tear-jerker and have a good cry



Catch Your Breath

Breathe deeply and slowly for 1 minute



Soothe Yourself

Place a hand on your wrist and take 5 deep breaths

Shake It Out



Get Moving

Move in any way that brings you joy



Dance It Out

Play a song you love and dance until your heart pumps



Walk It Off

Go for a brisk walk (in nature is even better)

Experience Joy



Laugh It Off

Share a funny memory or clip with a friend



Get Creative

Draw, sing, dance, write; process through play



Nourish Your Body

Slow down and savor your favorite healthy food

Reach For Connection



Reach For Safety

Share your struggle with a trusted loved one



Reconnect With Fun

Enjoy a simple, fun moment with a friend



Lean Into Affection

Share a long hug with your favorite human (or pet)

“If you’ve dealt with the stressors but haven’t dealt with the stress itself, your brain won’t let you rest.”

Emily & Amelia Nagoski

Sources of stress can be external to you: work, money, family, time, cultural norms and expectations, experiences of discrimination, and so on. And there are less tangible, internal sources of stress: self-criticism, body image, identity, memories, and the uncertainty of the future. In different ways and to different degrees, all of these things may be interpreted by your body as potential threats.

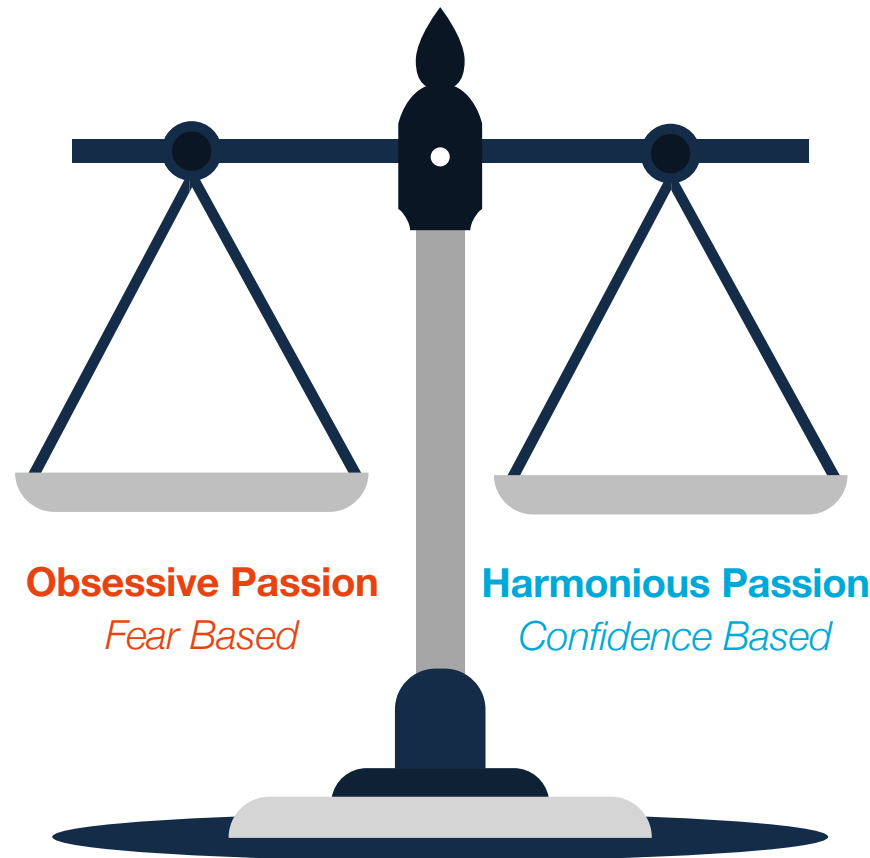
When you encounter one of these threats and are unable to frame it as an opportunity for learning and growth or connection, your fight-flight-freeze stress response is likely to be triggered (Crum, 2019). This sets off a neurological and physiological shift that changes your entire body and your mind in response to the perceived threat: epinephrine acts instantly to push blood into your muscles, glucocorticoids keep you going, and endorphins help you ignore how uncomfortable all of this is. Your attention is alert and vigilant, focusing on short-term, here-and-now thinking; your senses are heightened; your memory shifts to channel its functioning to the narrow band of experience and knowledge most immediately relevant to this struggle. And any process not relevant to the task of survival is postponed (McGonigal, 2019; Nagoski & Nagoski, 2020).

It is common to assume that the moment you deal with the source of your stress that your body and mind will return to a more normal state of functioning. But researchers suggest (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2020) that in modern life often our fight-flight-freeze stress response cycle becomes stuck due to lack of a clear signal that the struggle has passed and you are safe. As a result, your neurochemicals and hormones degrade but never shift into relaxation.

Emily and Amelia Nagoski in their book *Burnout: The Secret To Unlocking The Stress Cycle* note that simply telling yourself “you’re safe now, calm down” doesn’t help. If you’ve dealt with the stressors but haven’t dealt with the stress itself, your brain won’t let you rest. You have to do something that signals to your body that you are safe. For example:

- **Physical activity** - literally any movement of your body is what tells your brain you have successfully survived the threat and now your body is a safe place to live. Physical activity is the single most efficient strategy for completing the stress response cycle.
- **Breathing** – a simple, practical exercise is to breathe in to a slow count of five, hold that breath for five, then exhale for a slow count of ten, and pause for another count of five. Do that three times—just one minute and fifteen seconds of breathing—and see how you feel.
- **Positive social interaction** - casual but friendly social interaction is the first external sign that the world is a safe place. Reassure your brain that the world is a safe, sane place, and not all people suck.
- **Laughter** - laughing together—and even just reminiscing about the times we’ve laughed together—increases relationship satisfaction.
- **Affection** – it doesn’t have to be physical affection, though physical affection is great; a warm hug, in a safe and trusting context, can do as much to help your body feel like it has escaped a threat. Animals have also been found to be an effective source of affection.
- **A big cry** – let your body release pent up emotions with a good cry.
- **Creative expression** - visual and performing arts of all kinds give us the chance to celebrate and move through big emotions.

RECOVERY MINDSET



- Juggling an endless 'must do' list
- Worried you are not good enough
- Always trying to earn the right to belong
- Finding it difficult to switch off

THRIVE

- Mindfully 'choosing to' allocate time + energy
- Knowing you are perfectly imperfect
- Practicing self-acceptance
- Prioritizing rest and recovery

“I put my heart and my soul into my work and have lost my mind in the process.”

Vincent Van Gogh

While studies have found that finding meaning in your work brings many benefits Professor Robert Vallerand (2003) also suggests that when it comes to finding meaning and purpose in our work, we can have too much of a good thing.

His studies have found that:

- **Harmonious passion** occurs when we engage in our work because it brings us intrinsic joy, we feel we have a sense of control and our work is in harmony with other activities in life. We also know when to disengage and are able to turn off the work switch when engagement becomes too risky or we wish to enjoy other activities in our life. As a result, harmonious passion is associated with higher levels of physical health, psychological wellbeing, self-esteem, positive emotions, creativity, concentration, and work satisfaction.
- **Obsessive passion** occurs when we also perceive our work as important and highly valued, but we have an uncontrollable urge to engage in it and feel compelled to undertake it. We find it hard to stop thinking about our work, get frustrated when prevented from working, and persist even when it's risky to do so because our sense of identity and self-worth is heavily tied to our work. As a result, we feel conflicted between our passion and other areas of our life, leading to higher levels of negative affect over time and a risk of burning out.

If you think your level of obsessive passion might be too high, Scott Kauffman of the Imagination Institute suggests (2011) you might try:

Scheduling real breaks

Force yourself to get out by scheduling other activities during the course of the day (like lunch with a friend, or a break to hit the gym) and time after work or on weekends for family, friends, and activities you enjoy.

Don't bring work home

If you can afford to, make it completely impossible to access your work once you leave work. Don't bring home your laptop. Leave those files on your desk. Keep separate email accounts for home and work, and don't check your work email when you're at home (put up an out-of-office message if you have to).

Changing your thought patterns when you work

Fake the mindset of the harmoniously passionate person until you make it. For instance, convert thoughts of 'must' and 'need' to 'want' and 'desire'. At first, this may feel awkward, but eventually the obsessively passionate mindset will dissipate, and so will the behaviors associated with it.

Committing to a new hobby

Often, investing too much self in one project is an indication of a negative core self. The more additional things outside of work contribute to a positive sense of self, the less space your work performance will take up in your ego, and the smaller your chances of burnout.

DRIVE MINDSET

Fear Based

THRIVE MINDSET

Confidence Based



BELIEFS

You are worried that you're **not good enough** as you are.

You usually feel good enough, but are **sometimes haunted by self-doubt**.

You know you are a **perfectly imperfect human being**.



CHALLENGES

You view challenges as a **test of your self-worth** that you'd rather avoid.

You're open to challenges, as long as they **play to your passions and strengths**.

You **seek out challenges as chances** to learn and enrich your experience.



EFFORT

You reserve effort for your unique niche of **strengths and interests**.

You are **open to applying effort** in areas that don't come naturally to you.

You embrace effort in all areas, seeing it as **fundamental to leading a fulfilling life**.



HELP

You worry asking for help reflects weakness and will **rob you of future opportunities**.

You might **accept help when offered** but avoid seeking out help.

You **seek and accept help** to enrich your growth and relationships.



SETBACKS

You are **deeply threatened** by setbacks, as your identity is enmeshed with success.

You are **often disheartened** by setbacks, but remain open to learning.

You accept setbacks **as integral to growth**, experimenting until the goal is reached.



FAILURE

You are **fragile in the face of failure**, often avoiding it or blaming others for your errors.

You separate your worth from mistakes, but often **avoid owning them publicly**.

You **own and explore your mistakes** to enhance your learning and relationships.



FEEDBACK

You find feedback **painful to hear** in areas where you're usually successful.

You're **open to hearing feedback**, **most of the time**, if it's strength-based.

You ask for feedback about your **strengths and weaknesses to grow**.

With *heartfelt* thanks



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