



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 088 – Rejuvenation and the Immune System with Dr. Robyn McIntyre
November 10, 2021

00:05

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.

00:30 Kathy

Hello and welcome to Episode 88. Thanks so much for joining me for this shortened Wellness Wednesday episode, a little midweek boost to help keep your Warrior Vibe high.

00:41 Kathy

Today I'm joined by Dr. Robyn, who once again draws on her extensive medical training to give us some insight on why it's so important to take mental breaks and the impact rejuvenation has on our immune system. I've also linked up Dr. Robyn's website, DrRobynHealthCoach.com, that includes a contact form in the show notes.

And now onto the show. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

01:11 Kathy

Well, once again, I'm joined by Dr. Robyn health coach. Welcome back, Robyn.

01:16 Robyn

Thanks, Kathy. It's lovely to be here as usual.

01:19 Kathy

In our last episode, we talked quite a bit about what we can do to keep ourselves well. So let's spend a little time talking about the importance of rejuvenation.



So can you give us a little, just like you did with our Immune System 101, can you give us a little context on why it's important to take a mental break?

01:39 Robyn

Sure. I think that the context of this fits well with looking back to our evolutionary roots. Modern life is very different from how our ancient ancestors lived. And we're still genetically programmed to respond physiologically in the same way they did.

So their lives probably were mostly quiet, seeking food, finding water, creating shelter, caring for the young ones. And that will be punctuated by terrifying moments of drama, for example, being chased by a predator or perhaps a fearful interaction with another tribe. And that would have stimulated their fight or flight response, flooding the body with adrenaline and cortisol, with a body in a highly alert, stimulated state.

But then that would pass and they would go back to relative quiet, retreating to somewhere safe for the night between sunset and sunrise. Not much light, no television, no sirens or traffic noise, no work, you see where I'm going with us. No work emails arriving during the evening or opportunity to get that last bit of paperwork done. No phone calls or text to respond to and no refrigerators full of food. (laughter)

So nowadays, we have the opportunity to be constantly feeding ourselves literally. And we're realizing that our bodies do better with a break from food so the gut can undertake other functions. And in a similar way, we have our overstimulated brains, which are frequently in a chronic state of at least mild stress and sometimes more severe stress.

We've got social media images that make us feel inadequate, pressure to drop the children to ever more after school activities, we can be contacted 24/7. Remote work means that many are working longer hours and the demarcation between work and home life is more blurred. So we are busy, busy, busy, stimulated and on the go.

I read a quote recently that being busy is the adult form of procrastination - that really called to me. I have a feeling that this busyness is keeping us from the important stuff, we're losing sight of what is important. So we need to slow down and take breaks to just steal our minds and focus on priorities.



There's also evidence that being still improves our health, with improvements in sleep, the digestive system with the gut biome, the organisms that live in the gut being optimized if we take timeout, and decreased anxiety and mood improvements. It intuitively makes sense that breaks help our concentration and I've always studied with a five minute break every hour, which has worked well for me.

I heard a nice summary of the benefits of mental breaks by the writer Ferris Jabr. "Downtime replenishes the brain stores of attention and motivation, encourages productivity and creativity, and is essential to both achieve our highest level of performance and simply form stable memories and everyday life. Moments of respite may even be necessary to keep one's moral compass in working order and maintain a sense of self."

05:06 Kathy

I can relate to the hyperstimulation and falling into that pattern without realizing it. Because we have a device in our pocket 24/7 where we *can* be hyperstimulated. And it does take some discipline and some boundaries to be able to think about what we're doing and to make more mindful choices.

And so let's talk about some ideas for weaving in downtime. How might we be able to incorporate some of these breaks into our day?

05:39 Robyn

Sure, I think a great way to start is by being outside. Our caveman ancestors lived outdoors. And now whether it's because it's too hot or too cold or the television's on, we spend most of our time inside. When did you last go outside and look at the moon? I was looking at it last night.

05:59 Kathy

I was going to say last night - it was a beautiful full moon. (laughs)

06:03 Robyn

It was beautiful, that's right. And we have nice temperatures here at the moment. So it's good being outside even though you might have to bundle up north.



Having a morning coffee outside when we first wake up has the added benefit of helping set our sleep/wake cycle, because of the low angle of the sunbeams of the morning light. And actually just enjoying nature and the calmness of being outside.

Another approach for downtime is journaling and gratitudes. So just having to find the words to write things down helps to crystallize our feelings and helps us clarify our priorities. I often have the feeling, I don't know about you, Kathy, but I can't see the woods for the trees, I'm so close to something that I can't get perspective on it. And in fact, traveling has always been a great way to get perspective I've found, which we can't really do at the moment. But slowing down enough to journal helps to give that perspective.

And taking the time each evening before sleep to write down just three things that went well for you that day and reflect and immerse yourself and the feelings around those good events. This was recognized by Martin Seligman, who has done a lot of research on happiness. And it showed that by having these gratitudes, this increased feelings of satisfaction and lowered depression.

And just one more idea, breathing exercises calm us and energize us. If we take longer breathing out than breathing in, it stimulates our parasympathetic nervous system. And this is the sister, if you like, to our sympathetic nervous system, which stimulates us. If we stimulate our parasympathetic nervous system that calms us and resets us. And it's great for anxiety.

So an example of that would be the 345 breathing. You breathe in for one, two, three; you hold your breath for one, two, three, four; and then you breathe out for one, two, three, four, five. And you repeat that. Do that a few times. It's very calming for people.

08:14 Kathy

You know, as you were talking about all those things, I was reminded by a recent podcast guest of, do you remember who Stephen Covey was, he wrote a book...

08:23 Robyn

Yes. *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

08:27 Kathy



Yes, that's the book. And she reminded me of a concept that he had called the Circle of Concern and the Circle of Influence. There are lots of things in your Circle of Concern, what's going on with family, friends, in the news, and in your socials, all of that good stuff. So lots of things that you could be concerned about that can pull you in different directions.

But where can you actually provide influence? And there's an overlay. The Circle of Influence is in the Circle of Concern. It's a much smaller sphere. And so I've been very mindful lately of how I'm spending my time and where I am. Am I focusing on something that's taking my attention away? Or am I really focusing on something that I can influence?

And it also gives me this ability to have more time for rejuvenation because the time that I'm using, I'm focused, I'm getting what I need to get done, done. And I, the intention is, we'll have more time for some of these more rejuvenating tasks, which can fall by the wayside if I'm not careful.

09:40 Robyn

I really like that approach. I love the way that you can find time to do these things that are so important and prioritize them. And it also relieves some of the pressure. Many people feel that they're trying to live a good life, but feel as though they can never quite get it right. You can only do what you can do. And it's interesting how one person doing the right thing can actually influence that circle of friends and neighbors outside your circle of concern, you know, in the circle of influence. So, it's a smart way to identify how to use your time and where to spend it.

10:24 Kathy

Yeah. Well, Robyn, once again, I can't thank you enough for being here and sharing your insight with our listeners. I appreciate your time.

10:33 Robyn

Well, thanks, Kathy. And I really have enjoyed talking with you and just thinking about this material and doing a bit of reading around it has just reignited my interest in this area. So I appreciate the request and the interaction.



10:50 Kathy

Excellent. And we look forward to the next time.

10:53 Robyn

Thanks, Kathy

10:55

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.

If you'd like to access the show notes, have a question you'd like addressed on a future episode, or would like a transcript of this episode, visit www.AthenaWellness.com/podcast.

Until next time, be well!