

# Give it a rest

In exercise and life, we all need to take a rest every now and then, writes **Fiona Hoban**



I had to get a steroid injection recently for tennis elbow. My doctor explained that such injections were quite sore and that I would have to rest afterwards for up to 48 hours. “Yes, but can I still do my spinning class tomorrow, right?” I replied. “No,” he said, “because you’ll need to rest.”

I told my work colleagues that I had to rest. “Rest?” they queried, as if rest were some foul, four-letter word. “Well isn’t it well for ya. I had double that amount of steroid injections last year and carried on no problem. I wouldn’t like to see you if something was really wrong with you.”

Regardless of their quips, I went home and followed the doctor’s orders. I rested. And I mused about how resting is often seen as a cop-out, a weakness – almost a shameful indulgence.

I love spinning classes. I think it’s the combination of no-impact exercise and good music. I try to go at my own pace, which often means not going at the pace of the instructor. I realise instructors play an important part in getting the best out of the class, that they have to lead from the front and keep us motivated, but sometimes I wonder if they’re all not

just a little bit mad. I recently found out that a safe heart rate at which to exercise is typically between 50% and 70% of your maximum capacity. Anything over 80% takes you into the elite athletic zone. This zone is where many fitness instructors want us to be, insisting on “nothing less than 100%”. I attended one class in Dublin last year where the instructor barked at us: “We’re going to keep going until you physically cannot do any more. And if you need to vomit, vomit.” As I say, just a little bit mad.

And then you have this phenomenon whereby the less you need to sleep seems to be in direct proportion to how brilliant you are: “He’s amazing – he’s so much energy he only needs three hours sleep each night.” Amazing? Really? I could think of another word or two. Sleep is Mother Nature’s way of resting and repairing the amazing physical structure we call the body. Respect your body – it’s the only one you get. And mess with Mother Nature at your peril.

I often wonder how much of post-natal depression is down to hormonal imbalances and how much is down to lack of sleep. Would it not be better for new mums to be given the gift of a night’s sleep rather than the paraphernalia of so-called pampering (or tablets)? But what new Mum can indulge in the luxury of rest and sleep when they’ve to get their body back in order, aiming to look like they did pre-pregnancy in as short a time as possible? Some women don’t even have to get their body back because they avoid losing it in the first place. Pregerexia is on the increase, whereby women are so concerned about losing their figure while pregnant that they develop anorexia.

Brene Brown, a social scientist of the TED talks fame ([www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)), refers to a recent study done by Boston College where they wanted to find out what women need to do in order to conform to female norms. The answer? Be nice. Be thin. Be modest. Use all available resources for appearance. She says that we’re effectively caught up in a “web of unobtainable, conflicting, competing expectations about who we’re supposed to be. And it’s a straight jacket.”

It’s no barrel of laughs for the guys either. She worked with a client once who told her: “They’d rather me die on top of my white horse than watch me fall down. And don’t tell me it’s from the guys and the coaches and the dads, because the women in my life are harder on me than anyone else.”

Maybe it’s not just the fitness instructors that are a little bit mad. I think we all are. The Jesuit priest Anthony De Mello didn’t mince his words when he said: “I’m an ass and you’re an ass.” It seems that we are viciously and compulsively striving to have it all. Keep going, no let up, on and on, more and more. Anything less is weakness, not good enough, failure. What a load of needless nonsense. We all need a kick up the behind – a reality check.

An object cannot exist unless there is space in which it can be occupied. No space, no object. But we rarely give any thought or appreciation to the space that allows an object to exist. Similarly we cannot know how to start unless we know how to stop. So much of our focus is on starting, never on stopping. In that sense, I think we need to pull back from our various objects a bit and come to rest in the space that allows all such things to be. To rest in God (whatever God means to you). ✪

