



Nurture. Nature. Nap.

Nurturing your mind, connecting with nature, and resting your body can lead to a more realistic balancing act

Well-being encompasses nurturing our whole person, often described as balancing mind, body and spirit. It can be quite overwhelming and seemingly unachievable to strike that perfect balance of physical health, emotional calm, mental well-being, and spiritual fulfillment. "Balance" can become elusive, an artificial image of perfection leaving most of us struggling, frustrated and self-critical.

Life balance is not a clean mathematical equation, but rather a flow or process that moves and changes, like the seasons in nature. It becomes more about feeling and less about achieving. Here is a new way to feel more balance in your day-to-day life.

Nurture your mind. We often associate learning and growing with youth, and aging with decline. Positive psychol-

ogy theories and new neuroscience studies have debunked this bell-curve model, uncovering the fact that your mind never stops growing or learning. Encourage development by adding a new hobby or skill to your routine. No time? Then try this: Drive a different way to work or wander through a new neighborhood, with curiosity. These simple changes can stimulate growth of new neural pathways in the brain, expand your focus and arouse your five-sensory experience—all of which will feel good.

Connect with nature. Nature is a profound teacher of balance, and is the pivotal part of this balancing act. It has no agenda, ulterior motive or ego, and serves as a source for physical life. It also has an energy that bypasses our identifying, describing brain and can bring us to a state of awe and wonder, as if seeing nature for the first time.

This part involves stillness and silence, and doesn't have to be complicated. Nature is everywhere, especially here in Arizona. Find a spot that is easily accessible to you. It can be as simple as sitting on a porch or under a tree. The important thing is the ritual of visiting your nature spot regularly. Practice sitting quietly for at least 10 minutes (20 or more if you can), and notice your thoughts. Just watch how they jump and skip inside your head. Slowly nudge your attention towards the details of your natural surroundings. It will take some practice to let go of your thoughts without judging or acting upon them. Be patient.

Become familiar with your nature spot. Take notice of the plants and flowers, animals, insects, birds, and anything else you can see, hear or smell. Notice any changes that occur. Something as small as a hummingbird

passing by can deliver a sense of awe and wonder. I promise you, every day will be magically different.

Nature is also a great place to practice gratitude. When we have positive, appreciative thoughts, it is impossible for our brains to simultaneously have negative, fearful thoughts. This is a perfect way to slow down, quiet your mind, and stimulate the five senses—all of which will feel peaceful.

Take a nap. The final step in this new balancing act is about communicating with your body. Most of us are either busy working or focusing on others, ignoring our body's insistent signals to rest. It may be no accident that we fall physically ill when we're mentally and/or emotionally exhausted. Sadly, being "sick" may be the only socially acceptable reason for resting; otherwise we avoid rest and its associated feelings of selfishness or irresponsibility.

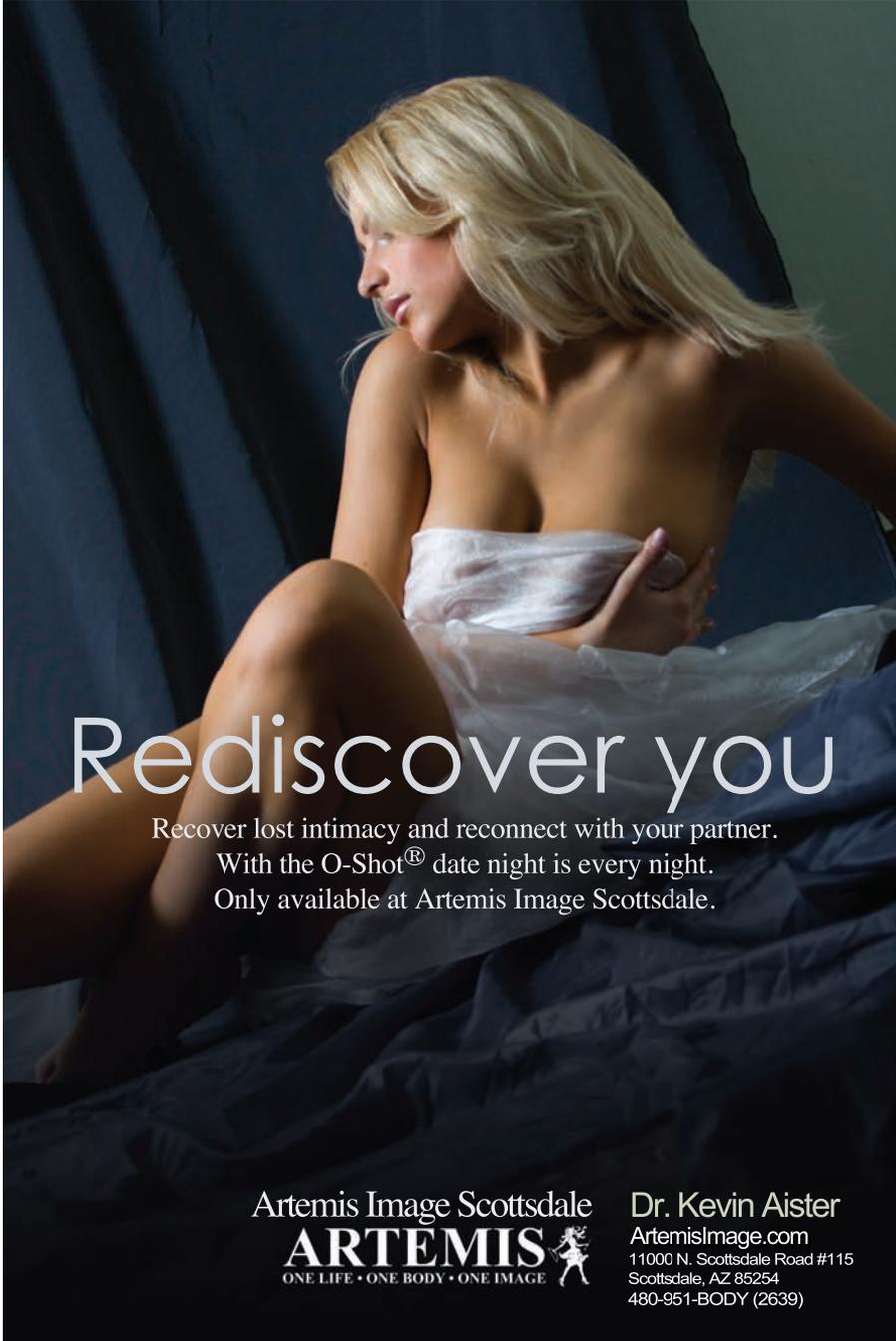
When life is telling you it's time to rest, you will probably feel as though you're making yourself push ahead. You may also feel: stagnant, blocked, exhausted, weepy, joyless, tense, panicked, or anxiously convinced that you must act. Although counterintuitive, this is the time NOT to act.

Resting is really about mentally, physically and emotionally stopping the pushing, the pressure of moving forward. It could take the form of literally taking a nap, or it could be as simple as taking a walk or reading a magazine. Any activity that will take you out of productive "action" can bring you to a resting state. You will know you're truly resting when your thinking mind quiets, and your creative mind begins to nudge you to move. Rather than feeling pushed, it will feel as though you're being pulled forward. You may

also feel: curious, fascinated, energized, giggly, joyful, relaxed and calm—all of which will feel playful.

Nurture your mind with something new. Go out and rest and play in nature. And don't be afraid to stop and take that nap. These are simple yet powerful ways to bring balance to your life on an everyday basis.

Valerie Steiger is a master certified life coach, event planner, retreat facilitator, and published author. She is passionate about integrating nature into coaching, and focuses on natural self-leadership for women in transition or seeking balance. Her newest endeavor, "Nurture-Nature-Nap", is a unique retreat experience for women. www.valeriesteiger.com.



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