



Slow Down

Linda A. Lubin, M.A.

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It is one of those rare days in January, when against all expectation it is warm out to the point of feeling like an early glimmer of spring. I sit at my kitchen table eating my breakfast, and watching the birds at the feeder on our deck. The wrens, the sparrows, the chickadees are all looking content and very well fed – small wonder given that my husband dotes on them far beyond what Nature intended. Well rounded in their winter fluff, I wonder if the balmy day is uncomfortable for them. The cardinals, on the other hand, always look trim and buff. No matter how much they eat, they never seem to gain an ounce. Do the plump little chickadees resent them for that?

Depending on your perspective, I am either slacking off when I should be getting on with my busy day, or I am taking a few moments to become calm and centered before my work begins. I would be the first to admit, I *do* thoroughly enjoy slacking off, and there are more times than I would care to count when I am doing just that. At this moment though, what I am doing is my own form of meditation. It does indeed help me to calm my mind as it wants to race through all I need to do in the course of this day. It slows my breathing, lowers my blood pressure, and allows me to savor and digest my breakfast. And it gives me a sense of gratitude for the beauty that is in the world around us, in the small simple pleasures of daily life.

All this in ten minutes time, for the price of some bird feed. In my work as a Health & Wellness Counselor I focus on stress whether my client wants to develop healthy eating habits, reduce anxiety before surgery, or use mind/body techniques to ease them through cancer treatment. When I encourage my clients to take time to slow down, relax, breathe deeply, and spend some time in nature, the response I typically get at first is a look that says, "Are you nuts!? Who has time for that?" Well, you do, and you, and you, and yes, even *you*. Learning how to do this is a challenge in a world that rewards filling every single waking moment with intense activity. Society tells us that relaxing is for wimps. You can get some rest when you're dead.

Sadly, that might come sooner than you think if you don't take the time for "chilling out". Chronic stress has been shown to be a key factor in a myriad of illnesses and disabilities. High blood pressure is the most obvious. But you may not know that it can also trigger and/or greatly exasperate type II diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol, rheumatoid arthritis, back pain, obesity, MS, migraines, gastric reflux disease, and infertility, to name but a few.

Taking good care of yourself involves healthy eating, exercise, getting regular medical exams. Of at least equal importance is learning how to remain calm even in the midst of your busy life, and carving out some time – even just 10 minutes here and there to do something deeply relaxing to you, whatever that may be. For you it may be soaking in a hot tub; going for a bike ride; rolling on the floor with your children; sailing; reading a novel; knitting; yoga; swimming. Or maybe, like me, it may mean just sitting and watching the birds. And contemplating some deep mystery: how do those cardinals manage to stay so trim?

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