The Joy of Taking a Powder

It's time for a flu shot. Or not. Whether you participate in the annual ritual or choose to forgo the needle, no one can deny that when the seasons change, many people find themselves catching colds, viruses, and other illnesses more frequently. One thing I've noticed is an ever-increasing number of people who refuse to take time off, whether from work or working out, when they are ill. And this is doing no one—not themselves and certainly not the people around them—any good.

Over the summer, I was fortunate enough to regain much of the vitality I lost when I was first diagnosed with multiple health issues more than a year ago. With my increased wellness came increased energy, which I put to good use, engaging in an ever-growing number of activities. What started with a personal challenge to walk 7,000 steps a day quickly became 10,000 and more. Working out with my trainer one day a week led to additional days in the gym on my own. I rejoined my rowing class, added a kettle bell class, and then, after years of saying it would never happen, I started accompanying my husband, Greg, to boot camp—at 6 a.m. on Monday mornings!

With all of these new endeavors on top of two or three weekly yoga classes, I suddenly realized I was back to working out a lot—sometimes twice a day—and at the YMCA at least once every day of the week. This brings me great joy! It had been my inability to participate in the fitness activities I love and the loss of the community of people who also love to work out and get fit that had been the most disheartening part of getting sick. All of a sudden—and it was sudden, happening over the course of just a few months—I was back in the swing of things.

But just as I was hitting my stride, I found myself sidelined by a series of minor complaints—headaches, fatigue, insomnia. And I got a cold. At first I couldn't understand it, but when I took a closer look at what I was doing, day in and day out, the truth was plain to see. In my enthusiasm to get fit, I had neglected to do one very important thing: rest.

Rest isn't just about sleep, although that is important, too. But anyone who is serious about health and wellness knows that building a rest day into your workout schedule—whether that's once a week or a couple of times a month—is as necessary as cardio and weight training. That's because any kind of activity, from running laps to lifting weights, damages muscle fibers, and it's while we rest that our bodies repair the damage. When that happens, muscles gain strength and size—not while we're working out, but during periods of rest.

Equally important is making time to rest when we're ill—not only so we can get well more quickly, but to take ourselves out of circulation so we don't infect others. I realize this isn't news to anyone, but since very few people seem to be heeding this advice, I don't think it hurts to offer it up again. Drink something warm. Go to bed. Get some rest. Your body (and everyone you aren't infecting) will thank you for it.

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