



Living life in the SLOW LANE

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that slowing down is good for us. Here's how to apply it to different aspects of your life



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We are a stressed nation – one report* found that 74% of UK adults feel overwhelmed, and that was before the Covid pandemic. Stress contributes to unhealthy lifestyle choices and disease – and it makes us miserable. We need a new approach, and if the five million hashtags on Instagram are anything to go by, ‘slow living’ is the mindset we’re craving.

‘It’s my suspicion that we reach a threshold of needing and wanting to slow down,’ says eco-psychotherapist Dr Ruth Allen, author of *Grounded: How Connection With Nature Can Improve Our Mental and Physical Wellbeing* (£16.99, Welbeck Publishing). ‘It’s often precipitated by a period of stress or busyness that we feel the effects of more than ever. Or by a big loss, or by our body saying “No” and giving us a bunch of symptoms that are hard to ignore.’

Yet it can take getting perilously close to burnout before we act – why is this? ‘As a society we’ve glorified being busy,’ says Marjolyn Poutsma, founder of theslowlivingguide.co.uk. ‘We need to redefine our definition of success – we shouldn’t always strive for more, bigger, faster, but make time for the things that matter most to us.’

Slow living is associated with the wellness trend, but while wellness often comes with a pricetag (Brits are predicted to spend £487 per head, annually, on it**) slowing down costs us little, but has the potential to hugely enrich our lives. It’s about perspective. ‘The myth around slow living is that it’s a luxury lifestyle to be enjoyed by the few who have abundant time or financial means,’ says Marjolyn. ‘That’s not true. It’s a state of mind rather than a lifestyle action plan, about being mindful and having an attitude of gratitude. When you pay attention to what gives you joy, when you feel connected to people, when you focus on what you have instead of what you have not, you’re likely to feel more confident, positive and fulfilled.’ You don’t need to make huge changes, she adds. Try these simple steps for starters:



Fancy exercising ‘slow’? Then turn to p72.

- ✦ Take some deep breaths in fresh air.
- ✦ Eat a home-cooked meal at a nicely set table.
- ✦ Engage in a slow activity like reading or knitting, even if it’s just for 15 minutes.
- ✦ Be grateful for three different things each day.

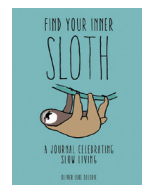
Slowing down doesn’t mean stopping; it’s about finding moments to feel at one with yourself and the world. ‘I’d encourage everyone to think about how they can bring more “time balance” to their lives,’ advises Dr Allen. ‘If the whole lot cannot be slowed, where are the priorities? What is your body telling you? When is it that you feel the fast pace the most? Start there. Do one job at a time. Reduce the “must dos”. Get outside and move to a different rhythm. Make this essential.’

NEED A HELPING HAND?

✦ **READ: Seeking Slow: Reclaim Moments of Calm in Your Day by Melanie Barnes (£9.99, Rock Point)**



✦ **WRITE IN: Find Your Inner Sloth: A Journal Celebrating Slow Living (£9.99, White Lion).**



✦ **MAKE: Unwind with a slow stitching kit (£43, wattle andloop.com)**



WORDS: DEBRA WATERS. PHOTOS: GETTY. *2018 REPORT COMMISSIONED BY THE MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION. **GLOBALDATA. ***STUDY COMMISSIONED BY UBEREATS. FIND ITS MINDFUL MOUTHFUL AUDIO GUIDE ON APPLE MUSIC AND SPOTIFY. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP.

How to slow down

SLOW... FOOD

Food is fundamental to existence yet, according to one study***, 74% of us partake in mindless eating habits, such as fridge-raiding. But if we pay attention to food – and allow our senses to engage with what we're consuming – it can relieve stress, aid digestion and prevent over-eating.

Reconnecting with what we eat is at the heart of Slow Food, a global movement that promotes eating well. 'Food should be about love, sense of place, culture, memories,' says Shane Holland, executive chair of Slow Food UK. Eating is essential to wellbeing, so it makes sense to eat what sustains us and our environment. Try a few simple recipes – the less, yet more natural, ingredients the better.

'The act of cooking will slow you down, save money, and if you seek out local producers help protect your local landscape,' adds Shane. Spend a leisurely afternoon baking or making preserves, and share your knowledge. Work for food and it will work for you.

SLOW... HOBBIES

Hobbies should be pleasurable distractions. Crafts, in particular, are beneficial. They stimulate the relaxation response – a restful state that helps lower blood pressure, heart rate and stress hormones.

Take slow stitching, for example. 'Slow stitching is a terrific mindful activity that can be done by almost anyone, anywhere. It forces you to be in the moment,' says Kylie Wright, founder of Wattle & Loop.

Bronwen Shepherd, who runs slow stitching breaks in Italy (textileholidaysitaly.com), agrees. 'A needle and thread and some scraps of fabric require just enough concentration to let go of worries,' she explains. 'If you focus on the

process of pushing the needle into the fabric, then pulling the needle out slowly and evenly, you'll find that your racing mind will settle.'

Here's how to slow stitch:

- ✦ Get a needle and thread and some coloured fabric scraps, plus an old pillowcase to stitch on to.
- ✦ Stitch them on to the background fabric, using a running stitch.
- ✦ Add texture – overlap stitches, fold areas to reveal the reverse. Don't think of designs, just stitch.

SLOW... TRAVELLING

Remember the saying 'Life is about the journey, not the destination'? This applies to slow travel, too.

Most people fly to their holiday, missing out on much of the country and only going where tourists are,' says Sarah Nash, founder of slow-travel.uk. 'Instead, travel overground by train, bike or boat – you'll encounter people who aren't there to service your tourist needs, they're people living real lives.'

Slow travel also helps us respect others and the environment. 'Tourism is a destructive industry,' adds Sarah. 'Visitors cause damage in terms of pricing locals out of their own areas, and local roads and public transport are filled with tourists.' Travellers, she advises, should always be mindful that they're holidaying in someone else's home.

Here's how to be a slow traveller, says Sarah:

- ✦ Stay in independently owned places where you'll be appreciated.
- ✦ Avoid main tourist sites (or visit them off-season or out of hours) and go off the beaten path.
- ✦ Avoid package holidays – not only do you save money but you spread your tourist wealth around.
- ✦ Be aware of your environmental impact. Don't leave rusting lovelocks on bridges or throw coins in streams.

'NOT MANY PEOPLE ARE BRAVE ENOUGH TO SLOW DOWN'

Here's how Emma Fullwood, 45, found her 'slow':

'I was always busy. I saw relaxation as boring and resting as lazy. Then suddenly life felt hard. As an exercise instructor I told clients to listen to their bodies, yet I never really knew what this meant. I blamed hormones, I found myself searching for drugs to get me back to normal, but after trialling different products I realised that being busy makes me feel anxious and drained. I decided to honour the message my body was giving me and switch lanes from the exhausted woman who felt overwhelmed to running a business in feminine energy.'

I've learned that not many people are brave enough to slow down – we base our self-worth on productivity. We often see burnout as needing medical attention but what if we got there beforehand, what if people acknowledged they need to do less to feel better? So I work with women who feel stuck and lead them into realising simple changes to their lives can elevate how they feel, that doing less is available to them and that less is actually more. Many of my clients work hard yet what they really crave is peace, space, time and pleasure.

My advice? Read a book over random phone scrolling; ditch alcohol if you're feeling anxious or tired; learn to say no; and set boundaries. I get up early and move my body for 15 minutes and do breath work. I set aside "me" time. I discovered many things about myself by slowing down – now I honour rest. I choose "being" over "doing" and it's changed my life.'

✦ Find Emma on Instagram @the_emmafullwood