THE CATALYST

Rest is not the same thing as recovery

A sprained ankle sparked a truth: rest isn't recovery. Phones don't recharge by idling—and neither do we.

By: Jessica Ward-King | Posted: August 10, 2025

The other day I was walking down the street when my foot hit a divot in the pavement, and I went over on my ankle. I heard – or maybe felt – a snap. My ankle started swelling almost immediately. To the emergency room I went and as I whiled away the hours scrolling, watching videos, and playing word games I watched my phone's battery dwindle and eventually I was "in the red." Uh-oh! I needed my phone to call a ride when my ER ordeal was done! With no hope of seeing the doctor soon and no charger in my pocket there was nothing I could do but give the phone a rest and turn it off.

Wouldn't it have been magical if, when I turned it back on two hours later, instead of finding my battery at 8% it had recovered its charge up to 50%? Wouldn't it be great if just giving my phone a rest would also recharge its battery?

Alas, that is not how it works – for phones or for people either. Rest is not the same thing as recovery. I need to recharge my phone if I expect its battery life to recover. I need to plug it in if I hope to recharge its battery. Luckily with a phone it is a very simple and linear process – we know exactly what to do when our phone's battery is in the red. But what do we do when our own "batteries" need to recharge?

Self-care is the obvious answer to mental health recovery, but it isn't as obvious what self-care looks like, because it looks completely different for different individuals. In fact, self-care is often maligned as an airy-fairy concept, awash with adult colouring books, meditation apps and yoga poses – and if those are your things, then great! But self-care can be and is so much more.

Some people (like introverts) recharge their batteries solo or with smaller group activities – reading, crafting or solo exercise. Others (like extroverts) find they recover better when they can feed off the energies of others and prefer to recharge in the presence of other people – parties, group activities and team sports. However, there are some all-round solutions if you are looking for ways to recover.

Taking care of your body with sleep, exercise and nutrition is a must. We all know this. But there are a lot of moving parts here! When you are in need of recovery it can be overwhelming to see the catalogue of things you are "doing wrong" in this department, and that is not the goal. The goal is to choose practices that recharge your energies, not deplete them. And so, beginning a practice of good sleep hygiene or drinking more water might be more manageable. Don't try to change everything at once and make it perfect – there is no such thing anyway. Just do something good for your body to help it rest and recover and celebrate that!

Experiencing nature is another powerful way to recharge your batteries. This is one self-care tip that becomes easier as the leaves and flowers bloom. Taking a nature walk or forest-bathing can help but even just sitting in your back garden or eating lunch on a park bench is enough to help restore balance.

These self-care tips are helpful in recovering your mental health, but these are not the tips that will lead you to recovery with mental illness. Medications, talk therapy and a good therapeutic alliance with your caregivers as well as peer support will help with that. And the road to recovery with mental illness is a long and non-linear process. But that process will be augmented by a self-care routine that keeps your batteries charged, giving you the energy to work at that process. In short, we all have mental health, and we all need to mindfully recover our mental health all the time, but mental illness requires a different kind of recovery.

Spoiler alert – my ankle was a simple sprain and I hobbled out on crutches and a prescription for, you guessed it, REST! In a few days it was right as rain. That is the last piece I want to touch on here. While rest is not the same thing as recovery, recovery takes rest. It takes time and relaxation – whatever that looks like for you. Sometimes staying off of it – metaphorically speaking, of course – is the best thing you can do for your mental health. Sometimes you need a crutch. So, take your weekends and vacation days to rest. Do something to take care of yourself. And watch your battery life go up.

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