

The Need for Replenishment: Restore Before Illness Strikes

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Some call it stepping off the merry-go-round, others a personal retreat. It's the time you give yourself to let go of life structures and allow your deeper truths, the fatigue, visions, creativity, and insufficiently nourished places, to come forward to be felt and healed.

It's similar to the cocoon phase when a caterpillar develops, rests and arduously chews its way out to its new life as a butterfly. The process that one goes through when attempting replenishment or life transition may be exhausting, restorative and transformational.

Food for Thought

Most of us see patients who are sick after they have missed this window, but catching someone before they "fall" can be the start of a new life. The body forces recuperation with illness. Replenishment requires that we get *quiet* in order to avoid it. Illness forces capitulation to the body's needs.

I've been on what I called a sabbatical for three months. I'm an extreme example as I have been engaged in 12 years of caretaking my injured daughter, have over sacrificed and need to get myself back. I've largely let go of my professional life, my home, and my correspondence with friends and family. I've gone to a new location, Kauai.

I have found many people needing replenishment here; an actress whose career died suddenly in mid life, a widower who couldn't fully recover from his loss, an athlete whose career ended in exhaustion, an acupuncturist who nursed her mother after a stroke. There are many who need deep replenishment but are not sick. I want you to know what I've lived because you may see this in your practice or go through it yourself. I've learned a few lessons the hard way and I hope to help you avoid my mistakes. My big lessons thus far ...

One: Replenishment is Innate

The replenishment process has a mind of its own — like giving birth or grieving the loss of a love, the body knows how to do this. It's not always easy or smooth sailing but if you honor the truth as it presents itself, much good is to be gained and many diseases avoided.

Two: It May Get Worse Before Gets Better

Some of the signs my body uses to tell me it isn't happy have gotten worse, even though I have changed my lifestyle to accommodate recovery. This is common and many people who slow down after having lived a "too full" life feel worse before they feel better. Apparently the body wants to express its true level of pathology. Expression of symptoms seems an important part of the process. So when you or your patients take breaks from routines, note that temporarily feeling worse can be the first step to feeling better.

Three: Rest is Best

When someone is in desperate need of rest they can become accident-prone. It's easy to get injured and it can take longer to heal injuries. It's wise to urge patients to avoid potentially risky physical activities, even if they are generally part of their routine.

Do less than you know you can. I had an old injury flare up from a simple hike. It has taken longer to heal because my body is already engaged in healing so it's busy. A friend going through a rough break up injured himself doing a yoga posture he has done every day for years.

Four: Less is More

I came to Kauai with a suitcase full of crude herbs. This was a customized formula prescribed by an herbalist who has worked with me for 30 years. He knows my body. But rather than tonifying me, as was intended, the formula that I had already taken for over a year, even with less ginseng in it, became too strong. It no longer calmed me. It over stimulated me. Symptoms worsened not because they reflected my true state of health but because the herbs gave too much attention to my weak areas and my body couldn't utilize the support.

I thought I was anxious, as anxiety was an integral part of my caretaking experience, but the emotion was caused by my heart rate being too high from the herbs. Anxiety is a tachycardia side effect. For two weeks I thought I was moving backward when I was taking the "right formula gone wrong" for my body. It took my going to an acupuncturist and having my pulses taken to help me see the problem. Now I know I must continuously have herb formulas revised throughout a retreat and I urge you to do the same for yourself and your patients. This is also true of other forms of treatment and medications. What usually works may be more than one can handle during a replenishment process.

Five: Food and The Earth Element

The body may ask for less food than it needs. I'm not hungry. Even so, I have chosen to eat. Not eating enough is both a sign and cause of earth element problems. If you have a patient in need of replenishment keep an eye on their dietary related behavior.

Urge them to be conscious about eating and view low food consumption or lack of appetite as a reflection of the chi's condition. I saw myself slipping into eating breakfast later and later, a sure sign of earth element deficiency, justified by the warm Hawaii weather and my lack of appetite.

Six: Replenishment Timelines

Replenishment may not fit your schedule. I thought I would need one or two months to get the fire back in my belly. Now, at three months I am not done. This isn't an agenda I would have set but my body is leading the way. Allowing the body jurisdiction in decision making when it isn't sick but conditions are different than normal may take some getting used to and additional attention.

Seven: Keep it Simple

The mind needs simplicity. I had never heard about a genre called "women's literature" before. It is made up of stories of women in all their varied forms of relationship. One author has sold over 60 million books so lots of people express their need for replenishment by reading these easy books.

My brain is more comfortable with simplicity and I have little desire to grow or learn even though I've had lots of book suggestions from people who want to help. Though it was initially

disconcerting, I would rather waste away reading recipes and watching the sunset. If you or your patients feel informationally challenged, remember I told you it's part of the process.

Trust is required! Fortunately I have had people around me who have gone through it and come out the other side. They tell me completion can happen. Please be encouraged yourself, or encourage those who seek your support, diving in fully means you walk out on stronger legs and with happier organs!

NOVEMBER 2017