

Replenishing Energy During Extended Challenges: Charging Your Battery

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We use physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy to deal with the range of challenges we encounter—both those that come to us and those we choose to take on. Each of us only has one energy supply, and it has to stretch to cover our challenges at home, at work, and in our local, national, and global communities.

While there are many components of resilience that help us deal with immediate demands and work through day-to-day challenges, there is a particular element of resilience that is especially useful for maintaining and/or regaining our well-being in periods of extended challenge. This is the capacity to replenish our energy when it is depleted.

Research suggests that burnout—a state that includes exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced effectiveness—results from a combination of high levels of *demand* (requirements to expend energy) and low levels of *resources* (things that help us meet demands, achieve our goals, and experience growth).

This perspective suggests that we need to work on both parts of the equation—limiting demand *and* increasing resources—to lessen burnout and increase well-being. Here's how I think about it: when the battery on your phone is low, you reduce demand by shutting down apps and limiting your calls and other activities to the essentials. But even if you shut the phone down completely, it still won't recharge the battery. For that, you need to connect to a power source.

It's the same for humans. When you're exhausted, you certainly need to think about how to limit the demands on your energy, and make sure you are minimizing large energy drains and taking time to rest wherever possible. However, this will never be enough to fully restore you. You need to do your own version of "plugging in."

I recently convened a group of about 30 resilience practitioners to learn about their strategies for replenishment and to brainstorm themes to share. Here are some of the things we identified:

1. **Walking** The most common replenishment strategy mentioned was getting outdoors for a walk. This combines physical motion, a change of scenery, deep breathing, and a chance to think. My favorite quote from this discussion: *"There's no such thing as bad weather, only the wrong clothes."*

2. **Hobbies** Finding an enjoyable activity and making time for it was another frequently-mentioned strategy. Building things, cooking for pleasure, craft projects, playing a musical instrument, photography, and many other hobbies give you a chance to exercise your creative brain and focus on learning and growth.
3. **Curiosity** The human brain needs variety and change as well as stability and predictability. Several people described activities that exercised their curiosity—connecting online with people they don't know, reading to learn about new things, and taking time to explore and discuss interesting questions are some examples in this area.
4. **Family** Several people mentioned spending time with family as a powerful source of replenishment. The people you choose to define as your family or “inner circle” can provide a sense of connection, belonging, support, and intimacy.
5. **Mindfulness** Quite a few people mentioned engaging in some form of mindfulness practice such as meditation, mindful eating, attention to being fully present in the moment, and paying particular attention to transitional times. These activities allow you to deepen your experience and focus your attention.
6. **Entertainment** Attending and/or participating in music, theater, and other live events is a source of energy for many people. These situations provide high levels of visual and auditory stimulation, social interaction, creativity, and sometimes energy-lifting movement and laughter.
7. **Exercise** One of our participants is a rugby player, and described the value of the physical activity as well as the joy of being with the group in their team practice. Others use gym workouts, yoga, bicycling, and running as their preferred form of exercise. Activating our muscles and moving our bodies fills our batteries in many ways.
8. **Solitude** For some people, stepping away from the day-to-day world through a weekend alone, making time to focus on oneself, or even just unplugging from the news and social media for a while, is a wonderful way to recharge. It allows a respite from the many distractions and competing priorities to create a sense of calm and an opportunity for reflection.
9. **Spiritual Practice** Several people identified spiritual practices such as prayer, worship, journaling, and meditation as ways they nourish their spirit. These activities are sometimes solitary and sometimes in community, but always involve some level of connection with something larger than oneself.
10. **Intimacy** Deep connection with other humans on physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels can be hugely restorative. Several participants mentioned the importance of building a few deep connections that they can tap into as a source of energy.
11. **Work** Many people derive significant meaning from their work, and several participants mentioned steps they were taking to improve, redesign, or reflect on various aspects of their business activities as a meaningful source of energy.
12. **Fun** Whether it's playing a game, singing while running, or enjoying “guilty pleasures” such as binge-watching a favorite show, participants described how doing things that bring joy and laughter lead them to breathe more deeply, smile more frequently, and live in the present moment.

What these activities have in common is that they feed some combination of important human needs—movement and strength, connection, meaning and purpose, accomplishment, joy, and all the other things that help us feel alive and strong.

As you think about your own well-being, I invite you to notice, as you go through your day, those things that actively charge your battery. What new priorities can you set and what new habits can you build to make sure these are a regular part of your life?