

A day of rest

By Lesa Knollenberg

I'm sidelined with a sprained knee. I know enough about body mechanics to know that this isn't good and won't get better without a side dish of RICE (rest, ice, compression and elevation). There is a certain claustrophobic fear that claws at me when I think about not working out, but a little rest sounds like a fine idea, too.

I'm glad, however, that my sidelining is short-term. It could be worse. In a recent *Runner's World* magazine, I read an article about a man who was given a choice: Stop running for the rest of your life, or get your leg amputated. Tom White, a doctor in Buena Vista, Colo., was in a motorcycle



Photo by Gus Knollenberg

accident some 20 years ago, and was left with a degenerative condition in his left leg. He and his wife coached and ran with the high school girls' cross-country team; he struggled through years of increasing pain. "With his natural leg, he faced a future without running or hiking — the pursuits that animated his physical self," says the article. With a prosthetic leg, however, he could return to his life — and his identity as a runner.

My dad, who has always enjoyed running, is wrestling with the age conundrum: He knows running is hard on his body, but he can't imagine stopping. He has always loved a run and a good sweat. Putting an end to that feels like sacrificing passion for common sense.

If given a choice between running and losing a limb, I'd cut the sucker off, just like Tom White. I know that. Running has been a mainstay of my life, and I'm no elite athlete or marathoner. So maybe I'm odd. To test my theory, I asked my middle school car-pool patrons what they would do. There was a definite line drawn in the van. On the right were kids who, like me, couldn't imagine a life without a run. On the left were kids who, much more reasonable and pragmatic, said that it would be crazy to lose a body part when there are so many other ways to keep in shape besides running. I dropped the kids on the left off at the bottom of the hill and squealed away. Let 'em walk.

But a thought has been circling my tired head lately that goes like this: Maybe we can't do it all. I'd like to run a 10-miler, write a column each day, have an organized home and be the life of the party, too. Some weekends I try to accomplish all of that, and by Monday I'm not equipped to run the blow dryer, let alone run my life. I keep thinking about the traditional Sabbath, a weekly day of

rest. In Hebrew, Sabbath means "to cease." Just stop. Take a breath. The day isn't meant to be a burden, but a day to rest, reflect and celebrate what we've been given.

Maybe a little rest — a little space in the cacophony of voices and choices — isn't a luxury. Maybe it's just what we need to reprioritize ourselves. We're the first generation to struggle with this constant rushing, frantic busy-ness, and it's because we have so many choices. Ten extra minutes? I could do some online banking, call the kennel to make arrangements for the pets, text a friend or get the crumbs out of my silverware drawer. They all need to be done. There are, however, three colorful house finches squabbling right outside my window and I'm tempted to stop and watch them. Just to sit in stillness long enough to watch some old-fashioned fledgling rivalry sounds decadent and rejuvenating, too.

The choices available to us can overwhelm. No matter what we do, we're ignoring something else. Soon all of the choices take on the same urgency, and swirl around our heads with a Tasmanian Devil-type chortle. That's usually when we need a little quiet psychic rest. Rest helps to chisel away our choices until we're clear about our path.

I think we need to decide what we are willing to give up in order to pursue what we're passionate about. The poet Linda Hogan admits: "I go through periods of time where I just do not answer the phone for a few weeks. You have to protect yourself as a writer, and you have to do your work ... One of the things I've decided writers need to do and know is that we don't have to answer every phone call and do everything that's asked of us. We're trained to be too giving. There's a point in our lives at which our generosity becomes a loss for us."

So if you call, I may not answer right away. I'm going to take a little time to slow down, focus and reprioritize. Plus I've got this sore knee — and three finches to watch that really need to learn how to chill.

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