

Convalescence

Julie Maree Wood



In the past it was taken for granted that after an illness the body would need time and care to fully recuperate. This period of recuperation was called convalescence. It is an old fashioned term but is just as relevant today as it was 40 years ago. A period of convalescence is particularly important for children whose immune systems are just beginning to mature.

I have been busy in clinic lately treating people struggling with colds, flus, bronchitis and other Winter bugs. Many have had numerous rounds of antibiotics and cannot understand why they or their children continue to get sick. Most are racing back to work or school before their body is ready. If you have been struggling with the bugs this Winter, consider whether you have had the time and space to fully recover. A common problem I see in clinic is people, young and old, resuming their usual lives as soon as they can get back out of bed. This only delays their recovery and often leads to another infection.

The cornerstones of convalescence are rest, light exercise, diet and medication (if required). The most important of these is rest. This means actual sleep and less activities. It may mean only doing what is absolutely necessary at work and home. For a child, it may mean missing a couple of weeks of after school activities once they are well enough to attend school, going to bed earlier than usual (even just to read in bed) and not doing any extra work. In essence, the rest means slowing your life down for a time and not speeding it up again until you are 100%.

Light exercise gives you some fresh air, sunshine and keeps everything moving. Let your body guide you as to how much is enough. You should not become fatigued by the exercise or it is too much for you.

Ideally your diet during convalescence needs to be warm, easy to digest and rich in nutrients. This means things like casseroles, stews, vegetable based soups and slow cooked pasta sauces. Foods that are cooked slowly are easier to digest and assimilate and so ask little from your digestive system.

Medication needs to be assessed on a case by case basis. Have a chat with your healthcare professional. Often, a judiciously prescribed supplement or two can do wonders in aiding recovery, helping to rebuild strength and rebalance the body after antibiotics.

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