

We allow things to come to us, instead of chasing them with sheer effort.'

It's not just about switching off – soft fascination can turn down the dial on things we find difficult, too. 'There is a difference between switching off and relaxing – watching Netflix or scrolling on your phone is not intense focus, but it isn't soft fascination,' adds Peeters. 'Long-forgotten hobbies such as fishing, football, scrapbooking, drawing, poetry, watching the horizon, dancing or camping trips can all bring the much-needed sense of respite that soft fascination offers. So remind yourself of the things you did that brought you joy when you were a child or a teenager and consider which of them you can bring back into your life.'

You are not a machine. Your mind needs rest. Actively allowing your mind to wander, ideally outdoors, is vital to counterbalance time spent doing things that lead to attention fatigue. 'Soft fascination is a place of loving kindness, compassion and wisdom, which goes beyond the brainy intelligence of the space of intense focus,' says Peeters. 'Intense focus might bring us effectiveness – by which I mean results – if we're lucky, but soft fascination brings us efficiency, which means reaching the desired outcome without wasting time, resources or energy. It's more intuitive and aligned with our heart and soul. And finding balance is more fun and sustainable too.'

It worked for me



Lynsey Bleakley, 44, the owner of an online bakery, says: 'As lockdown kicked in, I was faced with many problems. I was pivoting to keep my business going, despite cancelled weddings and events, and I also had a multitude of new challenges to make the company successful. I was working around the clock and soon I was running on empty. I'd forgotten about me time.'

'I'd been burnt out before and felt I was quickly heading there again. I knew I needed to employ some measures to help redress the balance and take better care of myself. So I made a commitment to start my daily walk again. Every morning, come

hail, rain or shine, I got up an hour earlier, when the coastal path and beaches were quiet, and headed out with my husband and our three labradors. We switched off from business. No phones. Just us – talking, soaking up the views and savouring the peace and tranquillity. We walk 5k every morning. It's now an integral part of my daily routine that I never want to be without. It's my sanity and saviour and helps keep my head clear and my body healthy.'

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EASY DOES IT

Ruth Thomson, a career coach, explains how to weave soft fascination into your life:

1 Rethink the idea of work
Many of us have been taught that work is action – sitting at a computer, writing emails or attending meetings. Reframe a walk in nature or a mindfulness session as work too. Almost everyone has experienced the solution to a problem or a new idea popping into their head while they are in the shower or upon waking... Your brain is still working for you.

2 Recognise the benefits
Take a mindful walk and notice how much better you feel afterwards. Scientific evidence backs up the power of mindful moments, especially in nature. Give yourself permission to make this respite an important part of your working day.

3 Find your soft activity
For me, it's swimming and walking in ancient woodland. For others, it might be meditating and walking in a city. Find the activity that works for you and embrace it.

▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Read *Blue Mind: How Water Makes You Happier, More Connected And Better At What You Do* by Wallace J Nichols (Little, Brown, £10.99)

Watch Neuroscientist Amishi Jha's TED talk on how we pay attention: ted.com/speakers/amishi_jha

Plan Book a nature retreat in the countryside for an attention reset. Find out more at sharphamtrust.org/mindfulness-retreats