

The Happy Highly Sensitive Life Podcast

Why You May Be Tired as an HSP and What to Do About It Podcast Transcript Episode 5

My first radical act of listening to my body came in grade school. I pretended to be sick so I could stay home from school for the day. Now looking back on it, I can see I was a wiped out HSP who needed a break. The world said I needed to go, but I knew I needed to stop. And so, on those days that I woke up with a morning sore throat and convinced my mom to let me stay home that day, I was taking the rest I needed to recharge.

As an adult, work, school and family obligations are a lot more complicated and you may feel like the idea of taking a day off because you're wiped out is just as bold as my 7-year-old voluntary leave day from school.

There's huge pressure to be hustling 100 miles an hour.

One day a few years ago, I was in my busiest season at work. I was welcoming our summer interns at the university, which was always a busy time. On this particular work day, I was exhausted because I worked a lot of the weekend. I got to the office and couldn't find my keys anywhere. I retraced my steps back to my car that was parked in a parking deck almost a mile away, and discovered the keys were in the ignition and the car was still on.

Another day earlier in my career, I'd worked a 12 hour day. I was leaving the office and was last to lock up and I got to the front door of the building and couldn't remember which key locked the front door. My mind was blank.

As a highly sensitive person, when I'm bypassing my body's fatigue, I'm absent-minded and more easily overstimulated, noise sensitive and jumpy. My sugar cravings go up since cravings for energy can show up as sugar cravings. And eating sugar is more likely to lead to a blood sugar crash later, which makes me hangry and even more easily overstimulated.

I'm definitely one of the HSPs that can't drink caffeine to compensate for my low energy, although back in the day, I tried green tea for energy. But that just left me anxious, jittery and more jumpy and kept me from getting a decent night of sleep.

The multiple causes of fatigue as an HSP

As HSPs, fatigue can come from more than just overdoing it. It can come from being overstimulated. From deep processing or from doing something new or stepping out of your comfort zone.

Pushing beyond your capacity may work for awhile but eventually you'll find that your life loses its luster. You're just going through the motions and your days aren't fun anymore. You no longer feel a spark and you've got nothing to look forward to. And eating sugar, drinking wine or doing online shopping become the only ways to have a moment to feel a little lighter. For me, sugar was my way to relax in the past.

Studying to be a health coach, I learned to look at how to make life adjustments so that your whole life nourishes you.

Now you may think, "I can't make any changes to my life, there's nothing I can do." If you are, remember that your mind has a natural negativity bias that stops you from stepping out of your comfort zone. Its intention is to make you proceed with caution. But I'm here to lovingly encourage you to look past those doubts and fears. To imagine how your life could be different, easier, more satisfying. What would that life look like? If you can imagine it, you can make it happen.

So today, in this episode, I'm here to share some strategies you can build into your everyday life starting today so you have a bit more space for rest. And I'm also here to nudge you to think outside the norm about how you can set up your life so that it works for you.

In this episode, you will learn...

- 5 things that may make you tired
- 6 breaks to consider adding to your life and day
- 3 gentle ways to uplevel your food choices to support energy during your day, including a doable way to eat less sugar
- How to build an aligned life to counteract burnout

I hope that this episode will give you permission to pause and recharge and release the pressure to be on the go constantly.

Let's dive in by talking about 5 things that may make you tired.

5 things that may make you tired

Being around other people

The first thing that may make you tired is being around other people. Say you've just had an intense emotional conversation or met someone for the first time and had to make small talk. Or you've been around unpredictable people that are emanating stress or anxiety. Absorbing their emotions and walking on eggshells is wearing. If you're with someone who has a very strong personality, and you feel you have to match their energy output, that's tiring too.

If you know your Myers-Briggs Type and you're an introvert who recharges by being alone and you live with an extrovert who needs to be around people to feel energized, you know how the pressure to be as social as them is exhausting. And if you're an extroverted HSP who is feeling overstimulated, you need alone time to recharge but you may find your energy becoming drained from too much time alone.

If you're not sure whether you're an introvert or extrovert, you can take a free personality test that has roots in the Myers-Briggs at [16Personalities.com](https://www.16Personalities.com). I'll link that in the show notes for you.

There's one other personality assessment that reveals something significant about energy levels and that's Human Design.

Human Design shows us that the body has four energy motors. The most powerful motor in the body is the Sacral. About 70% of the population has what's called a defined Sacral Center, these are the Generator and Manifesting Generator types. A defined Sacral gives you consistent energy to be on the go from sun up to sun down, working the traditional workday.

But about 30% of the population has an undefined Sacral Center. These are Projectors, Manifestors, and Reflectors. An undefined Sacral Center gives you a limited amount of energy and when you run through that energy, you need to rest to refill your tank. You are not designed to constantly be on the go. Your best work days give you a chance to rest if you need it. You may feel like you've struggled to keep up with the energy levels of the hustle and grind culture. And very painfully, people may have judged your need to rest by thinking you're lazy or unmotivated.

People with undefined Sacral Centers have cried from relief when they've run their Human Design chart and learned they had an undefined Sacral. They finally understand why they feel so energetically different from other people. Knowing this can give you a new level of self-compassion.

If you have an undefined Sacral and your partner or the people you live with have a defined Sacral, you may feel constant pressure to match their energy levels. So much so, that if you share a bed with someone with a defined Sacral, you will feel pressure from their defined Sacral

in your sleep. Human Design recommends sleeping alone and while this will take some loving conversations with your partner to navigate, it's worth it to try sleeping alone from time to time to see how the quality of your rest changes.

If your intuition is nudging you to learn whether or not you have a defined Sacral, you can run a free Human Design chart by going to GeneticMatrix.com and entering your birth date, birth time and birth country, city and state.

When you see your Human Design chart, you'll see it has 9 geometric shapes. The Sacral Center is the second square from the bottom. If it's defined, it will be colored in. Undefined, it will be white.

I will post an example Human Design chart in the show notes so you can see which is the Sacral Center, with a link to Genetic Matrix and instructions for running your chart.

Let's continue with talking about 5 things making you tired.

Deep processing

The second is deep processing. As an HSP, you are a deep processor. Meetings, client appointments, job interviews, or classes that require paying close attention leave you wiped out. An intense meeting with a charged agenda can leave you drained.

Your deep processing also kicks in when you're exerting high discipline and focus to complete a mental project or if you're processing and taking in a crowded space. Nothing makes me want to rest like the overstimulation that comes from absorbing all the sights and sounds and energy of a conference, a large family gathering or a funeral that requires me to be "on" and work a room.

Food that tanks your energy

The 3rd thing that can leave you tired in the day is eating food that's creating energy drops.

Convenience and processed foods that give you a quick surge of energy but lead to a quick drop in blood sugar can leave you tired, unfocused, impatient and irritable. Running on an empty fuel tank, you have less stamina for coping with deep processing and emotional fatigue and you're more easily overstimulated.

Changing my diet to a whole foods Mediterranean diet that balances my blood sugar led to a significant improvement in my energy and quality of life as an HSP. I no longer felt bleary-eyed and like I'm swimming up stream. I didn't realize how poorly I felt because of my food choices until I cleaned up my diet and experienced the difference. We'll talk more about gentle ways to uplevel your diet for more energy in a minute.

Why You May Be Tired as an HSP and What to Do About It
The Happy Highly Sensitive Life Podcast

Doing something new

The 4th thing that can leave you tired is doing something new like going out of your comfort zone and starting a new job or becoming part of a new friend group. Going into unfamiliar territory puts you on the alert as you try to make sense of a new friend group and being in a new space. I've been surprised in the past by how doing new things can be so draining. Like the times I thought it would be no big deal to stay the weekend visiting a new partner's parents.

Figuring out new group dynamics and navigating unfamiliar environments requires a huge energy output while you judge whether it's safe to be self-disclosing, learn new personalities, and put yourself out there over and over.

Living a misaligned life

The 5th thing that leaves you tired is being burned out from living a misaligned life. When you hear the term burnout, you may think of compassion or caregiver fatigue. That's a common term used by nurses and social workers to describe emotional and physical fatigue because of caring for others.

But in this situation, I'm referring to the ongoing stress of living a misaligned life and from over-tolerating any situation that isn't right for you, like a relationship, or a job. Perhaps you've outgrown it, or it's become toxic, or it's asking you to function in a way that goes against your essential nature.

If your life or work isn't a match for your essential nature, what at first feels like a growth opportunity, over time turns into a stressor that over extends you again and again. And if you're not ready to step out and cross the invisible bridge and make a change yet, living in a holding pattern leaves you worn out and perhaps even disrupts your sleep at night.

How to improve the life you're in right now

There are things you can do right now to help you build more rest into your life.

The first solution is to adopt a two-phased rest and recovery plan for big events like a job interview or giving a big presentation or traveling. In phase 1, I schedule time in my calendar to rest up before a period of stress. And then, after the event is done, I move into phase 2 and have time set aside to recover and recharge. This is especially important if I'm visiting family or friends for the weekend. I always keep my calendar clear and lay low and rest up the week before and then try to return home early in the day on Sunday so I have the afternoon to rest up before work on Monday. And if I'm traveling for the week, I want to get home on Saturday so I

have the full day to unpack, rest and prepare for the new work week. Re-entering work is much less jarring.

The second solution is to schedule breaks into your day.

There are 6 types of breaks to consider adding to your day.

Productivity research shows we do our best work only for limited periods of time. While this research is not HSP specific, it still is helpful for deep processing HSPs to remember.

As an HSP, you have those moments where your focus is evaporating when you're in the middle of a project and doing deep processing.

Try maximizing your energy for productivity by working for blocks of time. Break type 1 is taking planned breaks from deep mental work.

Take planned breaks from deep mental work

One of my Instagram followers told me about the Pomodoro Technique. You set a timer and work for 25 minutes, then take a 5-minute break. After 4 Pomodoros, take a longer 15 or 20-minute break. The breaks allow you to stay fresh. Try the [Focus To-Do app](#) that works on your iPhone, Android, tablet or PC. It makes it super easy to track your productive time and breaks. As an HSP, you can mute the ticking of the clock so it doesn't distract you. I love this technique and it's amazing how fast 25-minutes passes. I'll link this app in the show notes.

Lay down for 15-minutes to calm your sympathetic nervous system

The second break to add into your day comes after you've been in an exhausting meeting or conversation that's required you to listen deeply. For me, when I come out of a meeting, my first instinct may be to reach for sugar. But what I've noticed is that I really need a break. 15 minutes is all it takes. Resting will get you back on track again. And I love to lie down and rest. It feels so decadent. Studies show that laying down to rest calms the sympathetic nervous system. Your brain takes a break and your heart rate and breathing slow and your blood pressure drops. Not only does this rest promote healing and boost your immune system, it also strengthens your willpower.

Here's how I use this. I kick off my shoes, lay down, cover myself with a blanket. And create a sensory deprivation chamber. I turn out lights, close the curtains and make it quiet. If you've ever laid in Savasana at the end of a yoga class, then you know how wonderful this feels. I set

my phone alarm for 15 minutes and close my eyes. When I open them when the alarm goes off, I'm amazingly refreshed. And lighter. I can feel that my brain has shifted.

It's recommended that you lay down to trigger this relaxation response, but if you can't, then do this in your chair at the office or if you work in an open concept office, reserve a meeting room for 15 minutes and put your head down on the table.

Take a 5-minute walk outdoors

If you don't have 15 minutes to rest, Walking 5 minutes outdoors in nature decreases stress, improves mood and boosts self-control according to studies. And that's the 3rd break to try. A 2010 analysis of ten different studies found that the biggest mood-boosting, stress-busting effects came from 5-minute doses of exercise rather than hour-long sessions. Even a little helps according to Kelly McGonigal, author of the book [The Joy of Movement](#). Walk to the mailbox or around the exterior of your building for a mental reset.

The 4th break is to read a book.

Read a book

6 minutes with a good book reduces heart rate and eases muscular tension by 68% percent. It captures your attention and requires you to be completely in the moment, leaving your stressors behind. Carry a book with you and read when you're stressed.

Clean and organize

If you're too worn out after a work meeting to do a task that requires focus like reading, Have you ever noticed how cleaning and organizing makes you feel better? That's the 5th break. This is something I used to do at the office on Friday. My brain was fried, so a lower level work task like organizing emails or cleaning my desk or organizing my online files from the week gave me a chance to rest and restore while accomplishing a task I needed to get done anyway. Notice how restoring order gives you a sense of satisfaction.

Meditate

The 6th break is a meditation break. You've heard me talk about meditation on this podcast before. When you're wishing everyone around you would disappear and that your packed afternoon schedule would magically clear up, meditation is one of the self-care strategies that Elaine Aron, HSP researcher, promotes repeatedly. If you've listened to this podcast before, then you've heard me mention the benefits of meditation for HSPs. Studies show meditation increases alpha and theta brain activity. That means you become more relaxed with lower anxiety. Plus higher gamma activity means emotions are being managed better. And more left

prefrontal activation is a sign that more positive emotions are being generated. Listen to Episode 3 for more instructions on how to incorporate meditation into your life. Even 5 minutes to start can help. I'll share the link for [Episode 3](#) in the show notes.

Okay, we've just talked about ways to recharge and reboot your energy. Now let's talk about one thing that has made a giant impact on the quality of my day. And that's being intentional about what you're eating.

As I mentioned a few minutes ago. As an HSP, food choices have a massive impact on your energy level and physiological stress. If you want to see the difference that food can make for how you feel, do an experiment. One day eat a donut or bagel for breakfast and watch what happens to your energy and stress levels that morning. The next day, eat a breakfast with protein, a bit of slow digesting complex carbohydrate and vegetables and notice the difference in your ability to function. For me, the donut or bagel will quickly make me tired, unfocused and more easily overstimulated. I'm sluggish and want a nap.

If you're living a busy life, the idea of overhauling your diet can be daunting. There are 3 gentle ways to uplevel your food choices to support more even energy during your day.

3 gentle ways to ease into upleveling your food choices to support more even energy during your day

Curb your sugar intake during the workday

The first is to curb your sugar intake during the work day. If the idea of quitting sugar totally is overwhelming, you can still get some good benefits by avoiding sweets from 8-5 monday through friday. That way you're more likely to avoid blood sugar drops that squash your energy at the times you need to be productive. Anytime you need high energy and focus and to feel resilient, support that by avoiding sugar.

Set yourself up to be successful by getting all the sweets out of your work space and planning what you'll do instead when you normally would reach for the sugar.

Create a ritual that replaces the ritual of eating sugar. I like to have a spoonful of nut butter instead since the fat is satisfying like sugar. I also like a cup of ginger turmeric tea with licorice root for a slightly sweet finish.

If reaching for sugar is a reflex when you're stressed, try naturally lowering your stress levels by sipping some comforting tea while reading a few pages of a good book.

Add more veggies into your day

The second way to uplevel your food to support energy is to add in more vegetables to your day. Vegetables are not only full of nutrients, but they have fiber that makes you feel satisfied. When I don't eat enough veggies, I walk away from a meal grazing for junk food that's easy to overeat to the point where it tanks my energy a short while later. You see, nerves in your digestive tract detect the nutrient and fiber content in your food, sending a message to your brain when you've had enough. So eating veggies makes it more likely that I'll stay away from junk food that I'm likely to overeat leading to an energy crash later.

Replace simple carbs with complex carbs

The third way to level up your food for solid energy is to replace processed and simple carbs with complex carbs or whole grains like brown rice or quinoa. Swap out your sandwich for a grain bowl with your favorite protein, veggies and some grains. Not everyone can tolerate grains, but if you can, they digest more slowly and are an even source of energy as compared to processed grains.

Oh, and here's a bonus tip- have a bit of protein at every meal to help prevent blood sugar drops that make you tired.

Now we've talked about how food can support energy. Let's switch gears and talk about how to build an aligned life to counteract burnout.

How to build an aligned life to counteract burnout

When you hear the term burnout, you may think of compassion fatigue or caregiver fatigue. These are common terms used by nurses, therapists and social workers to describe emotional and physical fatigue because of caring for others. But here I'm referring to something a little different. I'm talking about the stress of living a misaligned life. Or the stress that comes from living a life that's not a match for you. Just like wearing a shoe that's the wrong size rubs and creates a blister.

How do we get in this predicament? For me it was following what I thought I should do, rather than listening to my inner voice and inner truth.

This comes in many shapes and sizes. For example, you may feel pressure to get a job in the field you majored in, even if you hate it. Or to say yes when you want to say no out of fear of hurting someone's feelings. Or that you have to do certain things to please your family or to keep up appearances with your neighbors or with the other parents at your kids' school.

For me, I fell prey to the pressure to marry under a certain timeline. As I talked about in [Episode 4](#), I got married for the first time at 34 because I thought I should. Society said it was time. All my friends had gotten married years before me.

We have other people's voices in our heads telling us what to do so much that we may not realize the pressure there is to conform to some external idea about how to live. I know I didn't.

When I was reckoning with the fact that my first marriage wasn't right, I got caught up in self-judgment again based on the idea that people shouldn't be divorcing in their 30s. Over and over again I thought, "divorced at 38, what will people think of me?!"

What if part of the goal of being alive is to live as the fullest and most authentic expression of ourselves? To hear what's in our hearts and to respond to it? To honor your uniqueness as much as possible? To give your body what it needs, when it needs it. To go to the bathroom when you need to pee rather than holding it. To rest when your body says to rest.

What if you let your creative imagination work its magic to design a way to live that honors both your needs and your desires?

What if, once you peel back society's expectations, the options are endless for how you can live your life?

What would you do if you could revamp your life to work for you?

In my first adult job after grad school, I started fantasizing about how to spend less time at work to live a slower life.

Books about voluntary simplicity with titles like *Your Money or Your Life* lined my bookshelf. They described inventive ways people can design their lifestyle to save money and report to an office less.

Things like creating co-housing arrangements to reduce the cost of living and your work hours. And owning a home with a rental space and then using the rental property income to reduce the number of hours you have to work.

I was never courageous enough to consider living off the grid in a yurt or a van to reduce expenses. That was too big a departure from how I was used to living.

But these books gave me permission to think beyond joining the traditional rat race, which was very depleting as an HSP.

In my second job out of grad school, I had the chance to work 4 ten-hour days, giving me a three-day weekend. The ten-hour days were long but the big payoff came from having a long weekend every week.

More than any other time, now is the time to explore alternate ways to work. The pandemic is creating a societal shift that is giving us expanded options for making a living. With more virtual jobs than ever before that allow you to work from home, it's more and more possible to find inventive ways to make a living.

I'm here to nudge you to think outside the box to create a life that works on all levels.

If you can't make radical changes right now, try taking leave time to rest when you need it. Sleep alone for a night or two if you have an undefined Sacral Center. If you work on the weekend, take a day off on Monday or as soon as you can. And if you're parenting, have a weekend by yourself by sending the kids off on an adventure with your partner or the kids' grandparents.

It's by pausing and breaking away that I find I have my most inspired breakthroughs for how to uplevel my life.

Remember, if you can imagine a way to add more ease to your life, you can make it happen. If your heart is calling you to live differently, get started today.

That's all for now, friends. I'm sending you so much love as you're making your way through this world as a highly sensitive person. And know that I am always here rooting for you.

If you have a question for me about something you heard on this podcast or want to suggest a topic for a future episode, email me at questions@happyhighlysensitivelife.com.

If you'd like to receive regular news from me, sign up for my email newsletter by following the link in the show notes. You can also connect with me on Instagram at [happyhighlysensitivelife](https://www.instagram.com/happyhighlysensitivelife).

If you enjoyed this podcast, please subscribe, leave a positive comment and rate and review it.

Bye now.