

# Corporate athletes' guide to refuelling for 2024

By  Anja van Beek

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The year is swiftly coming to an end, and in the middle of all its challenges and victories, the December break seems like a glimmer of hope — an opportunity to replenish and refresh our energy reserves.



Image: Supplied

I frequently call high achievers "corporate athletes" — people who recognise the balance between stress (energy spent) and recovery (energy renewed). They also need enough time and space to rest, but more importantly, they need to rest well.

Think about this: How well we take care of our body affects how well we perform under pressure. To be truly effective in our professional endeavours, we must first make sure that we have the energy necessary to leave a lasting impression.

Also, when you take proper time off, it will give you a clearer understanding of how you spend your time every day. There's a good reason why so many individuals think of quitting their jobs while on holiday. Taking a break from your daily routine can be exactly what you need to make a big decision. I am not saying you should quit your job while on holiday... but it is a really good time to reflect on the past year and what worked and didn't work for you.

## What truly ignites your passion?

It's important to intentionally comprehend what triggers your flow, a state in which time seems to pass without us realising it. Savour the small things in life. The word savour says it so well: "deliberately enhancing and prolonging your positive moods, experiences, and emotions". Dopamine, the reward chemical, is released in a biological dance when we're in this zone of flow.

Take a moment and reflect on what part of 2023 excited you most. Recall what was special in that moment and be specific. How did you feel, who else was there? Consider why that moment is standing out and how this ignites your passion. To increase the positive impact of that moment, share it with someone else over the holiday season because when we involve others in these savouring moments it boosts our resilience.

And to build on this and make the most of your well-earned vacation, create moments to savour times with loved ones and people that are important to you. Be intentional in focusing on celebrating what is going well in your world or simply let them know you are grateful to have them in your life.

## Enjoy your downtime and increase your physical activity

I cannot overstate the value of downtime. Think of this holiday season as an opportunity to replenish your energies. Being a corporate athlete is an approach that understands the importance of alternating between exertion and rest, rather than implying a constant push for top performance.

Remember: Our bodies need repair, restoration, and care because they are not machines. We need to protect our own energy reserves, much as a racing car driver wouldn't risk depleting the fuel tank. Resting well and on purpose is not a luxury — it's essential to maintaining high performance.



### Tips to replenishing your energy levels this holiday

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Studies have indicated that getting enough sleep can increase one's resistance to anxiety and sadness. Researchers at the University of York conducted this study, which shows that prolonged stress is a significant risk factor for a variety of mental health conditions, such as pathological anxiety and depression.

The study examined data from more than 600 participants in 2020, a period of prolonged stress brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. They set out to investigate the hypothesis that effective coping mechanisms promoted favourable mental health outcomes, which might be reinforced by getting enough good sleep.

To build your resilience during the holiday season, embrace the power of movement. We often refer to resilience as an emotional muscle and exercising will increase your capacity to deal with everyday stress.

How can you get more movement and exercise this holiday season? Use every stroll, run, or yoga session in nature to revive yourself; take advantage of any opportunity to participate in outdoor activities. And remember your deep breaths!

## The magic of consciously completing your year

An essential part of the corporate athlete's toolset is using retrospectives at the end of projects. This habit of reflecting is critical for teams to identify what they need to do differently going forward.

The purpose of a retrospective is to reflect on previous work completed, to identify patterns in the ways of working (good and bad), to decide what is important moving forward, and to focus on what the team will do differently, especially what they

want to improve.

Similarly, you can consciously reflect on the past year and decide what you choose to do differently in the next year. Use this simple exercise to help you stop ruminating about things that did not work as planned in the past year. To create completion so that you can have a restful holiday, do the following reflection exercise:

Divide a piece of paper into four equal columns. First, in column 1, consider the past year and write everything that is still missing from the puzzle. Highlight any encounter, event, or feeling of incompleteness or a missing component.

- **Step 1:** In column 1, list any interactions, incidents or projects that you are ruminating on. This can be a conversation with a colleague or a misunderstanding with a friend or a situation you might have handled inappropriately. Anything taking up headspace when you want to relax.
- **Step 2:** Continue to column two where you acknowledge anything about this scenario. For example, “I can acknowledge I’m disappointed with the response I received during a critical conversation” or “I can acknowledge I have overacted about an incident at school”. We are not trying to blame; we only list aspects that we can acknowledge at this point.
- **Step 3:** In column three you answer the question “What can I decide about this incident or interaction?” Let what you value be your guide when answering this question. This can be “I forgive my partner for the words that were used in our argument” or “I decide to have a follow-up conversation with the teacher before the start of the holiday” or “I choose to put myself in their shoes and understand their point of view”.
- **Step 4:** In the last column you answer the question “When I think about this incident or interaction what can I let go of?” This, for example, can be “I can let go of my guilt” or “I can let go of my need to be in control of every situation” or whatever is relevant in your scenario. Repeat this consciousness exercise until you feel a sense of calm in your body.

Take good care of yourself during the holidays, replenish your energy, and return prepared to take on the opportunities and challenges the coming year has in store.

## ABOUT ANJA VAN BEEK

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