

# hurry up and slow down!



- one minute bed time stories
- express Lanes in Fast Food Restaurants
- when it absolutely, positively, has to be there over night – even on a Sunday!

Our modern way of living teaches us that faster is better. Speed is the new king and our lives are measured in bits and bytes, dissected into milliseconds and micro-detail. Is it any wonder our health, relationships, sex lives and performance begin to suffer?

We are not designed to go flat out, around the clock. Life is meant to be a series of sprints interspersed with periods of rest and recovery. It is impossible to be 'on' 24/7. While we regularly need to boost the throttle into turbo drive and plough through those To-Do lists, it is equally and vitally important to spend time in cruise mode, time going slow.

The challenge is our culture has conditioned us to think that slow is evil; slow is seen to be the enemy of achievement. Slow is perceived as weak, passive, soft. Nothing could be further from the truth.

## the slow movement

The Slow Movement is all about slowing down life's pace, and taking time to enjoy the things that give us pleasure. It's about reconnecting with food, with people, with places, with life: these are the things that offer us meaning. The slow movement isn't anti-work or even anti-capitalist; in fact, as Carl Honoré says in his book *In Praise of Slow*:

*'The secret is balance. Instead of doing everything faster, do everything at the right speed. Sometimes fast. Sometimes slow. Sometimes somewhere in between. Being slow means never rushing, never striving to save time just for the sake of it. It means remaining calm and unflustered even when circumstances force us to speed up.'*

Founded by Italian Carlo Petrini, it started in the late 80's as a 'foodie fight back'. Petrini reacted to the opening of a McDonald's restaurant on the Spanish Steps in Rome. If you've ever been to an authentic Mediterranean restaurant you'll understand what Slow Food is all about - taking pleasure in preparing and eating food, enjoying quality wine and beverages, and being mindful of the ingredients used. Slow Food is an antidote to the 'throw it down as quickly as you can' fast food phenomena.

## cittaslow

Slow Food then gave birth to Slow Cities, or Cittaslow in Italian. Slow Cities (Slow movements always start with a proud capital S) are characterised by a way of life that supports people to live slow. Traditions and conventional ways of doing things are valued. These cities stand up against the fast-forward, homogenised world so often seen

“...it is equally important to spend time in cruise mode, or time just going SLOW!”



*on when you have to ... off when you can*

in other cities throughout the world. Cittaslow must have less than 50,000 residents and the manifesto contains 55 pledges or criteria, grouped into six categories upon which cities are assessed; environmental policy, infrastructure, quality of urban fabric, encouragement of local produce and products, hospitality and community and Cittaslow awareness. To qualify to be called a Slow City and to use the snail logo, a city must be vetted and regularly checked by inspectors to make sure it is living up to the Slow City standard of conduct.

## slow movement around the world

Japan has recently launched a Sloth Club. The 700 strong members dedicated to a less frantic and more environmentally friendly life.

Ludlow is the first town in the UK to be admitted to the Cittaslow network. There are now Cittaslow National Networks in England, Wales, Germany, Norway, Poland and Portugal, with other countries working towards setting up their own national networks.

The Long Now Foundation, formed in America, is building a giant clock that only ticks once a year to encourage everyone to take stock and slow down. Anyone got the time?

## slow movement in australia

The idyllic South Australian town of Goolwa has been named Australia's first Cittaslow. Situated near the mouth of the Murray River, Goolwa fits the brief nicely.

Rhonda and Stephen Doyle from Bloodwood vineyards in Orange are growing Slow wines in New South Wales' central west. Bloodwood has three whites, four reds, a Rose and a dessert wine all prepared under the guidelines of Slow Food. The Doyle's extol the philosophy of educating consumers about the fresh food and wines produced in their local neighbourhood.

Each year in October, Canberra stages a slow Festival. (I know the obvious joke here, but in respect to my friends from the ACT, I will refrain!). Throughout the week events are held to celebrate the Slow Movement, Slow Food and other Slow opportunities that Canberra offers (I know, I know ...). This includes diverse activities such as slow cooking classes; local foods and produce; meditation techniques; slow cities and architecture; slow education, parenting and more.

## lessons in slow from kenya

When I was a middle distance runner in the mid- to late 1990s, every year we'd get the opportunity to race and train with athletes from Kenya who would come out over the Australian summer's Grand Prix series. We'd get to hang out with great athletes and Olympic and world championship medallists like David Kibet, Moses Kiptanui, Daniel Koman and Sammy Langat.

Each year a different set of athletes would come out, and amazingly every year a new name would pop up and a new champion was born. There seemed to be an endless pool of talent flowing from Kenya every year. We also learnt that the elite Kenyan runners had developed training patterns based on listening to their bodies' needs. They would train when they felt good, and take time off when they needed it. It's not unusual for a Kenyan world record-holder to take two to three months completely off running every twelve to eighteen months, simply because they feel the need to slow down and recover.

## hapa hapa

Hapa Hapa is Swahili for 'slowly, slowly', and this concept is much more part of the African culture. In contrast, looking back on my running career, whenever I felt really tired I'd keep ploughing ahead (as do so many athletes) thinking that all I needed was to get some more miles in the bank and then everything would come good. In retrospect, I really do believe I would have run much faster if I had taken more notice of the Kenyans and rested more when I felt tired. In other words, adding some Hapa Hapa and going SLOW in order to go FAST.

## 8 go slow tips

Here are some of my favourite ways to relax. They're all great ways to go 'Slow', keep in the moment, and totally refresh yourself.

### 1. Slow stretching

Ease into Tai chi or very gentle, rhythmical stretching. Try doing a gentle 5 to 10 minute stretching routine before going to bed at night and concentrate on diaphragmatic breathing and lowering the heart rate.

### 2. Slow walking

Emulate my dog, Cougar. He's a 48kg Rhodesian ridgeback who stops and sniffs absolutely everything at the start of our early morning run – until I drag his lead and get him to speed up with me...

### 3. Slow weekends

Stay in bed on a Sunday morning and read the papers – without feeling guilty! (This might be a little more difficult with young children though). Avoid cramming as much as you can into every weekend. Don't race from engagement to engagement and event to event keeping up appearances every single weekend. Occasionally try shifting back a few gears and getting rid of the weekend To-Do list, practise cruising.

### 4. Slow 'mini-breaks'

Try getting away for a three day Bridget Jones 'mini break' and practice as many slow activities as you can. Avoid scheduling every waking hour with site seeing and checking off every museum, church, amusement park and significant site.

### 5. Slow food

Copy the Italians with a three to five course meal that takes a couple of hours to get through, and wash it down with a couple of glasses of hearty vino! A blow-out every now and then forms part a balanced life, as long as you're exercising regularly and eating well most days.

### 6. Slow gardening

Potter in the garden and take stock of the beautiful smells and lovely plants. An oldie but a goodie, 'just stop and smell the roses'.

### 7. Slow sex

James Gleick, author of *Faster*, reports the average time we spend making love in our fast forward society is four minutes. I can hear some of you saying 'Wow – do some people actually last that long?' Tantric sex is not just for hippies and rock stars like Sting. This 5,000 year old discipline advocates slow, mindful sex as a way to increased awareness and spiritual enlightenment.

### 8. Slow Thinking

Lye down on a bed of soft grass on a lovely sunny day and just stare at the blue clouds, dreaming slow thoughts and allowing time for idleness. It's amazing how often your biggest break throughs come when you turn off the conscious chatter and allow the subconscious mind to bubble through to the surface.

## further reading material

Read Carl Honore's book *'In Praise of Slow – How a worldwide movement is challenging the cult of speed'* or my latest book *'Flip the Switch – Why performance increases when you play hard and recover even harder'* for more great ideas and research into practising 'Slow'.

## final thoughts, slowly though. . .

As humans are becoming more and more disconnected from the things that really matter, the Slow Movement offers a return to a connected lifestyle. Try squeezing some 'Slow' into your life each and every week as an alternative to today's fractured, fast-paced, and increasingly unhappy, overworked and burnt out world. Performing at your peak requires a balance between being ON when you have to and OFF when you can. Now go for it, slowly!

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*(Main Sources: In Praise of Slow, Carl Honore; Flip the Switch, Andrew May; Hurry up and slow down, Elizabeth Farrelly, Sydney Morning Herald, June 28, 2006; Slow down you move to fast, Roger Cummins, The Age, August 17, 2004; Slow Wine, Elizabeth Frias, [www.bluemountainslife.com.au](http://www.bluemountainslife.com.au); Slowly does it, Christina Larmer, Get Into Life, Grand United)*