

COVER STORY

'TRAIN hard REST harder'

BURNOUT seems to be everywhere at the moment and of course with ubiquity comes derision. A few months ago journalist, Roisin Agnew spoke to Ryan Tubridy about her decision to quit her job and move to Lisbon after suffering work-related burnout. Listener response was mixed — with some accusing her of being self-pitying and, slur-du-jour, a snowflake.

While conversations around stress and wellbeing are opening up more and more, there is still a huge stigma when something intangible like burnout or fatigue prevents us from doing our jobs. Owning up to feeling overwhelmed or exhausted is just not kosher in this era of always being 'on'.

We have entered an age of acceleration, everything we consume is instantaneous, meaning our attention span is famously hitting an all-time low — eight seconds at last count, according to Microsoft. The pressure to perform in work and life is immense. FOMO — *the fear of missing out* — is well-documented at this stage, but FOBO — *the fear of burnout* — is on the rise among a generation that is living at break-neck speeds.

Enter author Jef Geys, and his new book, *Rest is the New Sport*, which advocates a whole new, and somewhat counter-intuitive, approach to wellness.

A former professional cyclist, Geys hit upon the titular insight quite unexpectedly when he won a race, that he should have lost.

"Twenty years ago, I was a champion of training," he says. "I trained longer and harder than anyone, but I was hit by fatigue and I was forced to stop — in the middle of a race — for the first time in my life. It was very acute. I was faint and my blood pressure was very low. Until then I had been training at the absolute limits of my human capacity but then my body simply wouldn't let me continue."

To his chagrin, Geys was put on complete rest — surely an anathema to a professional cyclist as the species are not known for their moderate temperaments. However, he

followed the doctor's advice. "After two weeks, I started back cycling with a race, and I won — without having practiced or trained in two weeks. It was clear that my body had needed to balance itself," he says.

Before that race, Geys had been a slave to training, if his performance was poor he never looked to

recovery as a solution but instead pushed himself harder and harder. The unexpected win inspired him to completely overhaul his beliefs and methodology when it came to his training. It also paved the way for his subsequent career as a sports physiotherapist and now author.

He consolidated his approach,

which is a precise and personalised combination of analysing the individual and prescribing exacting lifestyle changes.

He worked with Olympic athletes helping them to optimise their performance, before realising that his methods could be beneficial to everyone. Especially now, as more

and more hobbyists are taking up extreme activities such as Ironman competitions and ultra running.

Even beyond the world of sport, Geys could see that the pressures of modern life meant that fatigue and burnout was affecting everyone from CEOs to homemakers. Now, with his book, he seeks to offer a more rounded perspective on wellbeing and to debunk some of the fitness and nutrition myths that have sprung from the 'Insta Age'.

There's a huge amount of data and science in *Rest is the New Sport* — 8,000 subjects were tested over 12 years — but the message is quite simple and refreshing: *slow down, listen to your body*.

A former professional cyclist seems like the last person to be extolling the virtues of skipping your run, but he is emphatic that the rise in our focus on living well and doggedly achieving in work, working out, and life in general is actually destroying our health.



When you give an already fatigued body even more stressors, in the long run, you inevitably suffer from exhaustion and burnout

"The last five years fitness is more popular, we are getting pressure from our governments to take care of ourselves. There are a lot of health programmes around, but all these programmes assume the body is in balance and that is the biggest problem today."

The author's method is quite holistic and he is quick to stress that all the elements of an individual's life combine to produce burnout syndrome and fatigue. External stressors such as work and family, diet and sleep patterns all must be taken into account when treating fatigue and also when considering exercising.

He says that while people have undoubtedly become more knowledgeable about healthy lifestyle, thanks to the internet, there's a lot of inaccurate advice out there.

"We are much more informed about our health now, but it's very generalised information. Everybody is unique and what works for you in the past won't work for you tomorrow necessarily. If you did a diet five years ago and lost ten pounds it doesn't mean that doing the same thing now would work as well as it did then. The biggest mistake today is that we expect personal results from general information. It can work but it's not precise enough."

Often we think of burnout as a psychological condition, which Geys argues is simply not the case.

"It's a combination of things with burnout, it is not a psychological disorder but a physiological one. The body is one whole piece and most of the time when speaking about health it's a combination of physical and mental fatigue."

The book offers a detailed analysis of the four main types of fatigue, as follows: physical, hormonal, mental

In our always-on age, more and more people are approaching 'burnout'. Sophie White talks to author Jef Geys who says rest, not exercise, is the solution to curbing stress and enhancing performance

