

CHILL PILL

TAKING A BREATH YOU DONT HAVE TO EARN

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For most of our lives, the message that we “have to stay ahead” has been instilled in us. Our parents, teachers and even the media present the idea that must always be “doing.” Even when most of us try to relax, we go about it in a task-oriented, zealous way. When we are constantly overdoing it and pushing ourselves to exhaustion, over time it starts to feel as if we are constantly either running towards or away from something. Our days start to be more about keeping up than about being present.

But slowing down is not an easy thing. Slowing down and pausing can be difficult for our nervous system and can make us feel that it is easier to keep pushing rather than dealing with the emotional vulnerability that comes with being still.

Welcome to Chill Pill, a biweekly column every Wednesday about slowing down in a world that rarely lets us do so as college students. Here, we will talk about balance, burnout and the small things that can make college life feel a little less overwhelming.

Slowing down doesn't equate to caring less, but what it does mean is that you care

enough to keep moving in a way that won't cost you yourself. College life rarely leaves room for that kind of space. Weeks move faster than expected, days blur together and suddenly it's midsemester and you haven't taken a breath. There is an underlying press to keep moving, keep proving to others and yourself that you can handle and do it all.

But handling everything doesn't mean you never stop. There is a difference between giving yourself a moment and giving up.

Pausing without a reason is not about procrastination or disengaging from your responsibilities. But it is more so about disengaging in the belief and/or mindset that one's worth is tied to constant output. And that self-value is only valid based on how busy you are. Sometimes pausing and sitting on your bed after a long day and not doing anything in particular is meaningful. Sometimes it's about taking a deep breath before responding, instead of rushing to fill the silence. Now these moments do not change your life overnight and also don't solve all problems and also don't make college easier (sorry).

But what they offer is a way to soften experiences as we move through them.

Pausing not only helps to give your nervous system a

chance to catch up, but most importantly, it helps you to feel like a person again. Take the time to allow your thoughts to settle instead of piling up and remind yourself that you exist outside of due dates and expectations.

When you start to pause, you are allowing yourself a moment to ask, “Do I really want to do this? Am I only doing this to be nice? What am I actually feeling, and why?” Yes, it can seem a little childish or even uncomfortable sometimes, because slowing down makes you realize that sometimes what you are feeling is not so much about you but more about what is going on around you.

Slowing down will not make the world stop asking things of you. Responsibilities will still exist, deadlines will still exist, and sometimes life will slip right through our fingers. But being intentional with your rest, even if it is for only a brief second, allows you to meet those demands with more purpose and less self-erasure.

So if today feels full, overwhelming, or even just neutral, consider giving yourself a moment that doesn't lead anywhere. A moment that exists just to exist.

Sometimes the most meaningful thing you can do is nothing at all.

And that's okay.



The moon rises over Horsebarn Hill on Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026 in Storrs, Conn. Horsebarn Hill is the perfect spot to relax after a long week.

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