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HEALTH TIPS: TAKE A VACATION, JUST GO

Published: June 22, 2007 at 5:29 PM E-mail Story | Print Preview | License By ALEX CUKAN

UPI Health Correspondent Take that vacation and take it easy

Surveys show more than one-third of Americans do not use all of their allotted vacation time -- but they should, says a U.S. expert.

"Taking a vacation helps rest your mind and body so that you are more flexible and you have a better perspective when you come back," says Jon Allen, a senior staff <u>psychologist</u> with The Menninger Clinic in Houston.

However, experts at The Menninger Clinic also realize vacations can also cause stress, and they suggest:

- -- Allow time for departure and return. Build in some extra time for travel in Eat to Live: Crunch time vacation plans in case of glitches like a flight delay or snarled traffic.
 - Be prepared for cries of "I want!" from children. Explain to children beforehand that all spending money has been divided and put into a envelope for each child. When a child exclaims "I really, really want it!" take out his or her envelope.
 - -- Take time to unwind. Remember, the purpose of a vacation is to relax -not to visit every museum and historical monument in the guidebook.

Benefits of leisure

No matter what form a summer break takes, the benefits of leisure time can be powerful. Leisure doesn't have to cost money or involve major consumption, according to Yoshi Iwasaki, professor of therapeutic recreation at Temple University in Philadelphia.

"Focus on the quality of the experience instead of the actual activities," explains Iwasaki. "People value enjoyable and expressive activities in all cultures and if they can find meanings of life from these activities, the quality of life can be enhanced."

Iwasaki compared Western leisure to non-Western leisure and found that meaningful leisure contributed significantly to quality of life. Leisure activities include: dance, music, sewing, craft circles, storytelling, painting, spirituality, and humor as well as just having a safe place for a group to get together to talk, eat and take care of their children.

Iwasaki found that cross-culturally enjoyable and expressive activities provide:

- positive emotions and well-being.
- -- positive identities and self-esteem.
- -- social and cultural connections.
- -- enhanced learning and development as well as human strength and resilience.

Dealing with work while on vacation

Vacation-time is not always work-free. Twenty percent of workers say they plan to stay in touch with their workplace while on vacation, according to CareerBuilder.com's annual vacation survey. However, only 9 percent say their employers expect them to check-in.

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"There are a host of reasons why employees feel compelled to forgo a vacation or obsessively check in," says Rosemary Haefner, vice president of <u>Human Resources</u> at CareerBuilder.com. "Some may fear if they are gone and things go smoothly, it will send a message that they aren't needed; however, the opposite can actually be true."

If employees prepare in advance and anticipate issues, it can positively reflect on the worker's management and organization skills, according to Haefner. She recommends:

- -- Several weeks before vacation compile important information, key contacts and a list of any deadlines to give to co-workers.
- -- Instead of having co-workers call you, tell them when you are going to check in, so you can control the time allotted.
- -- If a big project and a great vacation are planned for the same week, expect one of the two to give. Schedule time off before and after the big project.

Avoiding 'post-vacation syndrome'

The general feeling of discomfort caused by a person's inability to adapt to work after finishing the vacation has a name: "post-vacation syndrome."

Humbelina Robles Ortega, a researcher at the University of Granada, in Spain, estimates 35 percent of workers in Spain between the ages of 25 and 40 will experience post-vacation syndrome.

Robles Ortega notes that getting back to a routine can cause both physical symptoms including: tiredness, lack of appetite, lack of concentration, drowsiness or sleeplessness, abnormally rapid heartbeat and muscular ache. Psychological symptoms include: irritability, anxiety, sadness, couldn't-careless attitude and a deep feeling of emptiness. To help minimize post-holiday syndrome, Robles Ortega advises:

- -- Divide the holiday time off into several periods. For instance, two 15-day holidays are preferable to one 30 days long.
- -- Get home a few days earlier to re-adapt from vacation habits like sleeping late.
- -- Plan trips and other pleasant activities all year, instead of only during summer.

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