

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

Vacation for the Health of It!

Whether it's a budget-friendly camping expedition to a local state park or an extravagant excursion to a sultry, tropical paradise, vacations are about more than just geography. They are about finding time to reconnect with family, friends and your inner self.

But that's not all. Vacations are of specific interest in health research (*J Travel Med* 2005;12:94-101). More and more scientists are realizing the numerous physical and emotional benefits associated with these brief respites.

Whether you have two days — or two weeks — Dr. Smith advocates regular vacations because they reduce stress, enhance immune function and improve mental outlook.

That's why Dr. Smith embraces "getting away from it all" as part of the **chiropractic lifestyle**: a philosophy that focuses on preventing disease by maintaining optimal spinal health, proper nutrition, exercise and stress reduction.

For more on the health benefits associated with vacations, sit back, put your feet up and read on!



Reduce Burnout

Burnout syndrome, according to an article published in an issue of *Current Opinion in Critical Care*, is defined as a "psychological state resulting from prolonged exposure to job stressors." Job stressors include deadlines, grumpy bosses and office politics (*Curr Opin Crit Care* 2007;13:482-8).

Some on-the-job stress is natural, and even healthy. However, when "grumpy" becomes emotional abuse — and work-related stress starts spilling over into the rest of your life — a career reevaluation may be essential.

If you are feeling burned out, avoid making any snap decisions. Instead, get away for a few days and consider your options. If you decide to remain in your current job, identify ways to change your physical and emotional reactions to the stress around you.

Derail Depression

Depression is one of the most prevalent health problems in occupational settings. And Dr. Smith warns that emotional depression often goes hand-in-hand with physical ailments. Fortunately, researchers note that "vacation has become recognized as one of the important candidates for alleviating psychological problems in the workplace." (*J UOEH* 1999;21:289-307.)

Based on questionnaire responses from 357 office workers, scholars dis-



covered that "decrease of leisure vacation chances was correlated with the presence of depression, and depression contributed to an increase in the absence from work."

Another way to beat depression is to spend your vacation helping others. CheapTickets.com and United Way of America launched a Web site designed to help travelers plan and book vacations where they can take part in volunteer projects. Access their website at www.unitedway.org. Their website has interactive tools that allows you to search for a cause-specific volunteer opportunity.

Hasten Happiness

The wellness benefits associated with taking a vacation don't cease the minute you return home, according to researchers from Austria's University of Vienna. Fifty-three employees of a medium-sized aluminum hardware manufacturer (16 women, 37 men) had less physical complaints and improved sleep quality and mood "as compared to before vacation" three days after returning back to work.

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But here's the best part: "Five weeks after vacation, subjects still reported less physical complaints than before vacation. The experienced recuperation during vacation explained 56 percent of the variance regarding the change of well-being." Based on this study, the researchers concluded that "vacation may improve well-being on a short term basis." (*Occup Med (Lond)* 2000;50:167-72.)

Whether your vacation was idyllically happy — or a frazzled nightmare — can make all the difference, however, when it comes to returning to pre-vacation burnout levels. In a study of 76 workers, researchers noted that "those satisfied with their vacations ... experienced greater relief." (*J Appl Psychol* 1997;82:516-27.)

The lesson here? If you are debating between a potentially depressing high school reunion or a sun-filled week snorkeling, opt for the lower-stress adventure! And take plenty of pictures to decorate your office with when you return to work. These subtle visual reminders dramatically affect mood.

Boost Your Confidence

White-water rafting, rock climbing, panning for gold and other exploratory outings are a great way to tap into your inner adventurer! New or thrilling activities heighten the senses, increase confidence and boost endorphin levels: the body's all-natural "feel good" hormones.

But before you strap on a parachute



— or embark on some equally adventurous pursuit — talk to your doctor of chiropractic first. Your doctor will give you tips on ways to minimize the likelihood of injury.

Ward Off Other Health Concerns

Simply jumping off the stress carousel may be enough to stop what's eating you or, to be more precise, what's eating holes in your intestines. Vacations can also help lower blood pressure. And since heart disease, obesity and sleep disorders are similarly linked to stress, a change of scenery may be *just* what the doctor ordered!

What Factors Make Vacations Healthy?

What factors specifically account for the refreshingly recuperative powers of vacation? According to a study involving 191 office workers, the answers include:

- 📌 Free time for one's self
- 📌 Warmer (and sunnier) vacation locations
- 📌 The opportunity to get in some exercise
- 📌 Plenty of restful, rejuvenating sleep
- 📌 Making new acquaintances

The researchers also noted that health-related vacation outcomes are "significantly affected by the way an individual organizes his or her vacation." (*J Travel Med* 2005;12:94-101.)

So, when planning your next time off, be sure to incorporate as many of the above wellness-boosting factors as possible!

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Vacation Tips

📌 **Plan ahead.** Nothing is more stressful than trying to book last-minute flights, hotel rooms and car rentals. If scheduling ahead isn't possible, consider hiring a travel agent to handle all of the details for you. And don't forget to include the entire family in the decision process.

📌 **Don't stress-out youngsters.** Overextended children can turn a dream vacation into a stress-filled nightmare. Consider the ages of your little ones and their activity levels when planning outings. Choose realistic goals accordingly. Avoid over-stimulating children with too many choices. Take along plenty of coloring books, crayons and other activities to pass travel time. Strive to maintain at least one or two of their "at home" routines, such as bedtime and snack selection.

📌 **Fly smart.** If your vacation involves flying, be sure to stay hydrated and move around as much as possible during your flight to maximize leg circulation. When the seatbelt sign is off, get up frequently and stretch. And avoid long layovers and "red-eye" schedules whenever possible.

📌 **Consider your budget.** Anxiety over every nickel and dime can ruin a vacation. First, prepare a realistic budget ... then decide where to go and for how long. Remember, a vacation does not need to involve lengthy travel in order to be relaxing. You might be surprised by the wealth of fun-filled and budget-friendly vacation opportunities close to you — if you take the time to look for them! Start by asking friends, family, co-workers and other acquaintances for suggestions.