Get Away From it All

Taking a vacation can significantly improve your well-being by providing a break from the daily stresses of life, allowing you to relax and recharge both mentally and physically. Vacations also offer opportunities for new experiences and adventures, which can boost your mood for a mental reset.

If you have ever shortened, postponed, or canceled your vacation time, it may be time to plan your next getaway. Leaving vacation time on the table may be taking a toll on your health. Unplugging is integral to well-being, productivity, and high performance. Use your vacation time:

**To increase mindfulness.** Breaking out of your normal routine takes you off auto-pilot and makes you feel more present and stimulated.

**For your heart’s sake.** Taking time off helps relieve stress, which has a correlation with heart disease.

**Reset sleep patterns.** Improved rest and sleep during vacation helps you return to work with the ability to think more clearly.

**As a brain boost.** When your brain is completely relaxed, it consolidates knowledge and brainpower. Uncluttering your mind allows you to think more clearly and boosts creativity.

**To spend quality time with loved ones.** Spending time with others strengthens bonds and fosters social connections.

**To get out into nature.** Spending time in nature has been shown to reduce negative rumination and improve overall psychological well-being.

People often worry about how a vacation may affect their workplace or job status. Instead, view vacation as a well-deserved positive that you are doing for your health. When you do take your vacation, it’s important to unplug from work. When you return from your getaway, you may find yourself spending less effort on routine tasks after your vacation than you did before.

Answers to life’s big questions like “What do I really want?” or “What’s important to me?” are more likely to come to us when there is some space and stillness.

“Time you enjoy wasting, was not wasted.”

John Lennon
Appealing and Appetizing

The journey towards better nutrition doesn’t have to be dull or restrictive. Making healthy food fun and appealing is a transformative approach that turns nutritious eating into a delightful adventure. Every recipe and meal has basic components to make it appealing. Knowing these elements is the foundation for making decisions on preparing food for presentation, enjoyment, and nutrition.

1. **Choose your food by color.** Color is the first and most important factor for appealing food. Use complementary or contrasting colors. The color in food is created by phytochemicals and other compounds that our bodies use as nutrients.

2. **Use specific shapes and sizes.** The size and shape of food influences how taste buds perceive that food. We recognize geometric shapes – triangles, wedges, circles, half-moons, cubes, and straight lines – and it pulls our attention to the plate.

3. **Texture influences the perception of the quality of the food.** Crispy, crunchy, or chewy textures simply makes chewing pleasurable.

Incorporating colors, shapes, and textures can make well-balanced meals an enticing and irresistible part of our daily lives.

Eating on the Go

Not everyone has time to spend hours in the kitchen every day. Sometimes availability is key, but the most convenient foods aren’t always healthy. Focusing our time on the things that matter most to us doesn’t mean we need to sacrifice healthy eating in the process.

Here are a few ways to eat healthy on the go:

- **Plan ahead.** Map out meals for the week, check out restaurant menus beforehand, or portion out snacks to intentionally plan for success.

- **Keep it simple & balanced.** Aim to include at least 2-3 food groups at meals and 1-3 at each snack. This simple strategy can help you make healthy choices wherever you are!

- **Opt for minimally processed snacks.** Processed foods tend to be readily available when you’re on the go, but they are typically higher in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars. Instead choose whole or minimally processed choices such as trail mixes, yogurts, or string cheeses.

Healthy eating can be done even on days when you feel like there isn’t any spare time. Use strategies to fit your personal goals and overall lifestyle and you’ll be in a great position to make the best and healthiest decisions possible.

Scrambled Eggs with Spinach and Feta

4 oz. fresh spinach • 4 large eggs
1 tablespoon butter • 1 oz. feta • 1 pinch crushed red pepper

Roughly chop the spinach into pieces. Crack the eggs into a large bowl and whisk. Add butter to a skillet and melt over medium heat. Add the chopped spinach and sauté until soft. Pour in the eggs and gently fold until eggs solidify. Top the eggs with feta and red pepper.

“I know once people get connected to real food, they never change back.”

Alice Waters
Deep Listening

Communication is the key to positive social interactions. Active listening is a good way to foster healthy relationships and improve time management. When people know that we are going to listen to them and try to understand their message, trust and strong relationships are built, and conflicts are more likely to be resolved.

To practice active listening:

- **Give your full attention.** Stop other things you are doing and make eye contact while focusing on what the person is saying, and not on how you will respond.

- **Resist the impulse to interject with comments or questions.** You don’t always have to agree. Pause and consider what they are saying without judgment. Think before you respond or share your own opinion, and avoid saying something that you might regret later.

- **Seek clarification to ensure you correctly understand the speaker’s message.** Ask open-ended questions to invite the other person to elaborate, clarify, or explain their point of view. This creates the opportunity to identify or anticipate problems and devise a strategy to address the issue.

"You can’t have a plan for your day until you have a plan for your life.”

Tony Robbins

Step Out of the Hustle

Expectations of life can feel overwhelming. If you feel like you’re not doing enough, another to-do list may not be the resource you need. Being busy is not the same thing as being productive. Life management tools allow you to do more in less time and create space to step out of the hustle and into the real enjoyment of life.

Start with your end goals then work backward with these suggestions in mind:

1. **Pursue a higher purpose.** What do you want from your life? What do you think about that brings you a sense of joy, fun and freedom?

2. **One thing at a time mindset.** With a clear vision in mind, take control of your time and make your actions count while focusing on your desired outcome and not getting caught up in the intimidating details.

3. **Feed your mind during downtime.** Continue learning at every opportunity to further your knowledge by listening to podcasts, audiobooks, or reading while waiting for appointments to start or while doing mundane tasks.

4. **Cultivate relationships.** Plan for opportunities for deeper connections, reserve time to play, and develop bonds. View the time you take to relax and connect as important to your overall well-being.

5. **Communicate clearly.** Effective communication leads to better relationships at home and work. Life management becomes easier when you slow down and take the time to listen.
Explore the Outdoors

Have you ever taken a walk outside to calm yourself when feeling stressed or frustrated? Recreational activities are beneficial to your health no matter where you do them, but they reach another level in the great outdoors. Time spent in parks and other green spaces helps to improve mental health and reduce stress.

Some of the most popular outdoor recreation activities are running, jogging, biking, camping, fishing, hunting, hiking, rafting, birding, photography, paddling, swimming, nature-watching, and skateboarding. There are countless places and ways to get outside and enjoy nature. Whether seeking wide-open spaces or exploring urban neighborhoods, remember to recreate responsibly when you visit.

Know before you go. Check the status of the place you want to visit for closures, fire restrictions and weather.

Plan and prepare. Reservations and permits may be needed. Make sure you have the gear you need and a back-up plan.

Respect others. There is space for everyone and countless outdoor activities. Be kind to all who use the outdoors and nature in different ways.

Leave no trace. Respect the land, water, wildlife, and communities.

Make it better. We all have a responsibility to sustain the places we love.

“The richness I achieve comes from nature, the source of my inspiration.” 
Claude Monet