

Prevention Co+olumn

VACATION – JUNE 2021

Vacation: Essential for good health

All workers are entitled to vacation time. That's because it's important. Nevertheless, many people postpone it, or worse, don't take it at all. Is that really a good idea?

- **53% of Canadians** don't use all their vacation days.¹
- The average Canadian worker is entitled to 17 days of vacation a year, but only takes 15.5.¹
- Studies show that taking at least one week of vacation a year reduces the risk of heart attack by 30%² and **increases happiness** during the 8 weeks leading up to it.³



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Taking your vacation time is a must!

Just like the need to rest your muscles after an intense workout to prevent physical injury, taking a mental break from work is essential to avoiding health problems. Vacations aren't a luxury, they're a necessity.

Work defines so many aspects of our lives, from sleeping to eating to socializing. It requires us to put our own natural rhythm aside in favour of one that's basically imposed on us.

Vacation provides a break from that routine. It's a time to forget about deadlines and performance requirements for a while, to eat and sleep when you feel like it and to spend time with friends and family. In short, it's small pleasures that have a big impact on your health. It's a time to reconnect with yourself. ■



[HEALTHY MIND...]

Getting away from work completely is great for our mental health. Stress levels go down and the body secretes less cortisol, the stress hormone that increases anxiety and psychological distress. Vacation has been proven to:

- Reduce the risk of depression
- Promote happiness at work and job satisfaction
- Increase mental and physical well-being⁴

Not to mention that when the brain is at rest, we start to see things differently. When we're on vacation, we visit new places and try new things. It's a real boost to our creativity and our ability to problem-solve.

[... healthy body]

But there's more. Taking vacation can literally extend your life. Studies confirm that people who take vacation are less likely to suffer from heart problems than those who don't. Women who take vacations twice a year are eight times less likely to develop heart disease than those who take less vacation. Skipping annual vacations also reduces life expectancy.⁵ That should be enough to make workaholics think twice! ■

WORKERS WHO DON'T TAKE VACATION

Fear of being judged by others, too much work, not enough money, feeling indispensable, fear of missing something important...there are so many justifications for not taking vacation! It's not surprising that over half of North-American workers don't use up their annual vacation entitlement. In Canada, 53% don't take advantage of time off. On average, Canadian workers only take 15.5 of the 17 days of vacation they're entitled to each year. As a result, an average of 26 million vacation days are lost, or the equivalent of \$4 billion in compensation nationwide.¹

Others are more inclined to take time off for a well-deserved rest, but don't actually unplug. They continue to check their messages regularly. A LinkedIn study of 2,000 Americans showed that 70% of workers stay connected to work while on vacation.⁶ Is that a good thing for employers? Not necessarily. According to the same study, 58% of people who hadn't taken vacation in the past three months said they were more often overwhelmed and 21% felt disorganized at work.

Conversely, employees who work for companies that encourage a healthy vacation culture:

- Are generally more focused and productive
- Are more motivated and happy at work and with their employer
- Have better interpersonal relationships

These are all factors that contribute not only to psychological well-being, but to physical health as well. In short, vacation is good for our overall health. ■



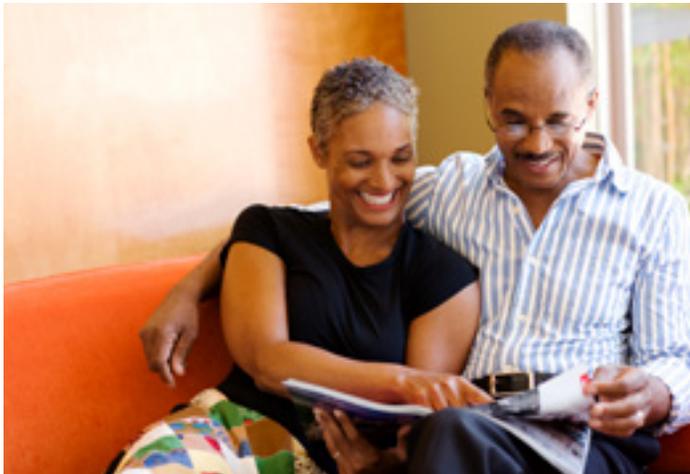
The art of taking a true vacation

A successful vacation takes some planning. Here are a few tips:

- Leave with peace of mind by making sure big projects are completed, having someone cover your work and delegating wherever possible.
- During vacation, do what you please and try to follow your natural rhythm. Be spontaneous!
- Avoid thinking about work and checking your email. If possible, put away your electronic devices.
- If you do choose to work, do it because you want to, stick to minor tasks and set a time limit: an hour a day, for example.
- For longer trips, plan to have at least two days at home before going back to work so you can ease back into your routine.
- When you go back to work, avoid working overtime and try to get back up to speed gradually. The shock of going back to work could diminish the benefits of your time off.



There's no ideal length for a vacation. Long periods of time off might make it easier to unwind, but after more than five or six weeks, going back to work can often be more difficult. For those who have a lot of unused vacation time, psychologists suggest taking more long weekends throughout the year. Even short breaks can make a world of difference. ■



WHAT IF YOU CAN'T GO ANYWHERE?

Many people see vacation as an opportunity to travel. Of course, travel plans can always fall through. Does that mean you should forget about taking time off? Not at all! Staying home can be just as beneficial, if not more so.

Take a stroll through the local market, go for a hike, do something artistic, visit a museum, go camping, see friends, go kayaking, go for long bike rides, order takeout from a favourite restaurant. There are lots of ways to enjoy a change of pace without venturing far from home. After all, the important thing is to break the routine and get some rest. Just put work out of your mind and recharge your batteries! ■

In conclusion

Taking vacation is by no means a luxury. It's essential for our physical and mental health. The benefits have been widely documented. So no more excuses! Better to enjoy your vacation time now than be forced to take time off later for health concerns. ■

1. Expedia, *Canadians set to leave close to 10 million vacation days on the table this year*, Expedia.ca survey finds, [Online: <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/canadians-set-to-leave-close-to-10-million-vacation-days-on-the-table-this-year-expediaca-survey-finds-530381471.html>] (page visited April 15, 2021.)
2. Cleveland Heart Lab, *Vacations and Your Heart*, [Online: <https://www.clevelandheartlab.com/blog/vacations-and-your-heart/>] (page visited April 19, 2021.)
3. Shannon Torberg, "Importance of taking vacation," *Allina Health*, [Online: <https://www.allinahealth.org/healthsetgo/thrive/importance-of-taking-vacation>] (page visited April 19, 2021.)
4. Meredith Carey, "Why You Should Use Your Vacation Days Even If You Can't Travel," *Condé Nast Traveler*, [Online: <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/why-you-should-use-your-vacation-days-even-if-you-cant-travel>] (page visited April 15, 2021.)
5. Gump, B. B. & Matthews, K. A. (2000). "Are vacations good for your health? The 9-year mortality experience after the multiple risk factor intervention trial," in *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 62, 608-612, cited in *Les vacances, ça fait du bien*, Cohezio, [Online: <https://www.cohezio.be/fr/les-vacances-ca-fait-du-bien>] (page visited April 14, 2021.)
6. LinkedIn, *Your Workplace Guide to Summer Vacation*, [Online: <https://blog.linkedin.com/2018/july/11/your-workplace-guide-to-summer-vacation>] (page visited April 19, 2021.)