WELLNESS**MONTHLY**

Out and About? Take Some Downtime | **July 2021**

71 percent of yearly vacationers report feeling satisfied with their jobs, compared to 46 percent who never take a vacation.

Out and About? Take Some Downtime

As COVID-19 pandemic restrictions are lifted, many people are re-emerging like bears from their dens after a long winter.

When bears hibernate, they go into a state of torpor to conserve their energy. After hibernation, they are in a state of walking hibernation for two to three weeks while their metabolic processes rev back up so they can raise their cubs, hunt and forage over the summer.

Similar to a bear, you may have been feeling groggy, and now that you are free to roam (safely, of course) you're more energetic. You may want to explore your territory, find other places to visit, or check out new sources of food and entertainment.

Downtime

Downtime means different things to different people. In human terms, it is considered a period of relaxation or decreased activity. In industry, it may refer to taking machinery or technology offline for updates or repairs.

The pandemic has created a pent-up need for employees to get downtime to rest and regroup.

However, there may be barriers. Vacation sounds great, but some people have a hard time taking it.

For example, you may be unemployed or have only recently gotten re-employed and haven't accrued paid time off. You may be an essential worker who is still needed on the job. You might plan a cost-effective "staycation" and end up doing a home improvement project. Or you might take time off but remain available in case something comes up at work.

Surveys show the American work ethic, while admirable, also contributes to what psychologists refer to as "indispensability syndrome." Before the pandemic, the U.S. Travel Association estimated more than half of Americans did not use all of their annual paid vacation time. Last summer (2020), 72 percent of Americans didn't take a vacation and 44 percent of employees didn't use any of their paid time off, according to a survey by ValuePenguin and LendingTree.

Out and About? Take Some Downtime

Health Effects

Time off without fear of repercussions is good for business because it improves employee health and work performance over the long term. Accordingly, employers are advised to find ways to pace vacation scheduling to accommodate a higher than average volume of requests through 2021 and maintain vacation policies that support well-being.

A pause in work responsibilities creates space to do things that promote physical and mental health, such as getting more exercise outdoors, spending quality time with friends and family, pursuing hobbies and community activities, and napping. A pre-pandemic survey conducted by Nielsen on behalf of Diamond Resorts found:

- People who take vacations are two times more likely to feel satisfied in life.

- 71 percent of yearly vacationers report feeling satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs, compared to 46 percent who never take a vacation.

- Of those who take a vacation at least once a year, 86 percent feel they have a strong bond with their families.

According to Gallup-Heathway's Well-Being Index, people who "always make time for regular trips" had a 68.4 well-being score in comparison to 51.4 for less frequent travelers. Studies also show that people tend to be less tired, more focused and better able to manage their time after they return from vacation. Taking time off from work typically helps reduce stress. Even the act of planning a vacation is associated with better mood and improved resilience.

Health effects of not taking a vacation include fatigue, poor morale, depression and heart problems – all conditions that contribute to lower productivity and lost time.

Working well over 40 hours per week increases the risk for work-related disability and early death. In a study, the World Health Organization and International Labour Organization found that working 55 or more hours per week is associated with an estimated 35 percent higher risk of stroke and a 17 percent higher risk of dying from ischemic heart disease when compared to those working 35-40 hours a week. (Refer to Environment International, September 2020.)

Research also shows:

- Cumulative effects of stress contribute to high blood pressure and heart disease. Stress management helps reduce the risk for coronary heart disease and heart attacks.

- Stress affects neurotransmitters in the brain that are linked to memory, depression and anxiety. When the body and mind are allowed to relax, the brain induces the release of calming and restorative chemicals.

- Racing thoughts and feeling overwhelmed affect sleep quality. Adults need an average of seven to nine hours of sleep per day to rest their bodies and avoid loss of focus, forgetfulness and fatigue, which contribute to accidents and injuries.

Experts say even a long weekend away can rejuvenate your spirit and reinvigorate your body. If you tend to think you are indispensable at work, you won't stay that way if you don't take good care of yourself. Acknowledging that no one is perfect, and everyone needs a break from time to time, is likely to be the healthier way.

Do Your Homework

Americans are feeling more confident about traveling. For those who will be traveling in the U.S., it's important to check state and local public health requirements; COVID-19 prevention policies vary by jurisdiction. Similarly, when traveling out of the country, it's wise to fully review arrival/ departure rules, country and local policies before planning a trip. Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's web pages on domestic and international travel to learn more.