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Vacation Therapy

Are you getting an adequate dose?

According to *Psychology Today*, Americans work 100 more hours per year than the Japanese, and work up to three months more a year than Europeans. Yet, the United States is the only country that does not mandate paid vacation leave, whereas Europeans average six weeks of paid vacation annually. In fact, the right to an annual vacation at a minimum duration is mandated by law in 78 countries around the globe – with penalties for deferring vacation.

So, what's the big deal, you may ask? Well, not taking time to get away can actually be detrimental to your health. According to a recent study conducted by the State University of New York at Oswego, men who take annual vacations reduce their overall risk of death by 20 percent and their risk of heart disease by 30 percent because they are given a chance to de-stress. Beyond that, workers who put in 50 hours a week get the same amount of work done as those that put in 40 because fatigue leads to being less productive.

Aside from these facts, if a vacation is still not in your future plans, consider these benefits... and then call your travel agent:

Health Benefits

- Blood pressure, heart rate and levels of the stress hormone epinephrine decrease on vacations after only one or two days.
- Improvement in exhaustion occurs when individuals have free time to relax, spend time in warm climates, exercise, get a good night's sleep and meet new people.
- Vacationers get three times more deep sleep when their trip is over as compared to working stiffs.
- Leisure activities have been linked to overall well-being and maintenance of solid physical and mental health.

Relationship, Educational and Cultural Benefits

- Anticipation of a vacation increases positive feelings of one's family and life.
- Since satisfaction with life increases on vacation, the effects remain once travelers return home.

Career Benefits

- Three out of four corporate executives believe that vacations prevent burnout, improve personal job performance and improve creativity.
- More than one-third of small business owners report that their best business growing ideas come during down time, not at work.

Recommendations

Now that you are convinced that taking time away will benefit all aspects of your life, consider these recommendations for thoroughly enjoying yourself while you're away:

- Generate a list of work-related things that you do not want to "pack" for your vacation. This includes worries about your supervisor or colleagues, career

advancement concerns, cell phones, pagers, laptops, PDAs and guilt for taking a vacation.

- Build your vacations around things that you love to do or have always wanted to do.

- Do not schedule every minute of your trip; give yourself a chance to wander and explore.

- Savor moments that are

truly great on your travels, like a relaxing dinner with a friend or a scenic walk with your significant other.

