

Keeping your health and wellbeing in the know

MyHealthTALK

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Full Begins Sept. 22!



The Benefits of Vacation Time

When was the last time you took a vacation? A real vacation—one that did not include checking work emails, voicemail messages or firing up your laptop?

If you are like most Americans, you might not remember when you last took time off. In fact, at the end of 2011, 57 percent of Americans had unused vacation time on the table. The United States is the only advanced economy that does not guarantee by law any paid vacation time—holidays or otherwise. Given that, it is understandable that we are not apt to take PTO.

Disconnecting, even when it seems impossible, is a great benefit to your health. As we inch closer and closer to 2014, you might want to consider squeezing in some time away from your desk before those vacation days are gone.

Taking a vacation actually contributes to your health and your work. According to *Forbes*, not taking time for a vacation can up the chances of developing heart disease in both men and women. Not only will a vacation temper your stress levels, it will help your productivity as well. Research shows that not

taking vacation time causes employees to become, resentful and less productive over time. By unplugging and getting away from work, you will ensure increased productivity when you return.

If the idea of packing the kids into a car or running to the airport gives you a headache, consider a staycation. You don't have to jet off to a tropical island to reap the benefits of time away from your work. A staycation can be just as relaxing (or more so if you hate to travel) and will be less costly than a traditional getaway.

Rachel Pomerance, of *U.S. News and World Report*, offered some tips for a successful staycation. She suggests planning things out ahead of time. Explore your area. There may be some fun attractions you weren't even aware of! Let the entire family contribute to plans. She also suggests getting into vacation mode—that means no chores and no work. And as with all vacation plans, don't expect everything to go perfectly. Let go and enjoy the time off.

Whether it's a two-week vacation to the Bahamas or a weekend at a state park, the key is in disconnecting totally and completely. Giving your mind a break from the everyday demands of your job will help you to be your best when you are at the office. Use those PTO days—you'll be happy you did!

Sources:

"5 Tips for a Successful Staycation," Rachel Pomerance, *health.usnews.com*, May 30, 2013.

"Americans Don't Take Vacation Even Though It's One of The Best Benefits Around," Kelly Phillips Erb, *forbes.com*, July 9, 2013.

"Vacation? No thanks, boss," Annalyn Censky, *money.cnn.com*, May 18, 2012.



Get Your Grains

From amaranth to wild rice, whole grains offer a plethora of health benefits. The key is in the first word—whole. A whole grain has not had the germ and bran separated. That means whole grains retain more of their nutritional value compared to those grains that have been refined, or broken down. Those health benefits include fiber, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. It is recommended that at least half of the grains you eat in a day be whole grains.

So, what should you look for when searching out whole grain products? The Whole Grains Council has instituted a stamp for products that have at least half a serving of whole grains in each package-labeled serving. There is also a 100 percent stamp for those products containing a full serving of whole grains in each package-labeled serving.



Not every whole grain product has the stamp, though. Check the packaging and ingredient list for key phrases that will indicate whether that product contains whole grain. Always look for the word *whole* first. Phrases like *whole wheat*, *whole grain* and *stoneground whole grain* represent products with whole grain in it. You should be weary of products that list multigrain, wheat flour and semolina. Products with these labels could be made with whole grain, but these words do not guarantee that.

Try one of these varieties of whole grain this month:

Barley, Bulgur, Corn, Millet, Oats, Quinoa, Rice, Rye, Wheat, and Wild Rice.

Need some inspiration when it comes to cooking and eating whole grains? Check out the Whole Grains Council website for recipes. It can be as simple as using an air popper to make popcorn. Try making your own granola by toasting oats, nuts, raisins and honey. You could also try making a salad of quinoa, tomatoes, feta and cucumber. You can even drink your grains! Add a scoop of oats to your next smoothie for a whole-grain boost.

Fall Harvest

Fruit and vegetables are the core of a balanced diet. They provide vitamins and minerals everyone needs to fend off disease, control weight and live a healthy life. They can also add color and variety to your meals.

You can get your daily servings with fresh, frozen, canned or 100 percent juice options. The best way to enjoy your fresh fruits and vegetables is to consume them as soon as possible after purchase. If you can't get your produce on the dinner table the very same day you buy it, you should read up on how best to store your bounty at fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org. Proper storage will help you get longevity from your produce, and ensure that you do not help the spread of bacteria.

September is Fruit and Vegetables Month and with good reason. Fall is a great time to try adding more fruits and vegetables to your diet, as there are plenty in season.

Find these fruits and vegetables at the supermarket or farmer's market:

- Acorn squash
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Butternut squash
- Cauliflower
- Chinese long beans
- Endive
- Garlic
- Mushrooms
- Pear
- Apple
- Pumpkin
- Sweet potatoes
- Turnips