

Staying Relaxed and Refreshed After Your Vacation Has Ended

You know the wonderful way you feel after a great vacation? You feel rested, relaxed, more resilient and better able to manage stress. How can you make those feelings last and stay refreshed? For the sake of your health and well being this is a goal worth striving for. Here's how to continue feeling relaxed long after you return to your everyday routines.

What happens on vacation?

What happens on vacation for most of us is that life slows down and we have time for ourselves and the people and activities we care about. Things feel less complicated. We can be unscheduled and unplugged. We may kick back, do nothing, be lazy, and feel almost childlike again. We can take a break from electronic devices, social media, chores, laundry, paying bills, and most of our worries—even if only for a few days. The effect feels wonderful.

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How do I "take back my time?"

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This requires looking at what elements felt so good about your time off and then asking yourself these questions:

Did I get more sleep when I was on vacation? Is that why I felt so rested and relaxed afterward? How can I get more sleep now?

Did I spend more time with people I like being with, including shared meals and time for extended conversations and recreational activity together? What would make it possible to make more time for this in my everyday life?

Did I take some time alone? How can I make time for quiet reflection and other mindful activities like meditation, yoga or relaxation breathing, for example, when my vacation is over?

Did I have vacation routines I cherish, such as walking on the beach, playing cards, taking naps, reading books, or eating certain foods? Couldn't I keep up some of these routines even when I'm not on vacation?

Staying refreshed and relaxed

There *are* ways to stay feeling refreshed and relaxed long after you return to your everyday life. You may need to be proactive and consciously develop new habits to promote wellbeing to make this happen. Here are some suggestions.

Remember to breathe and to take mini-breaks. To maintain some of the relaxed feeling from your vacation, take a moment for a few deep inhalations and exhalations several times over the course of the day. Such mini-breaks can help you feel centered and more in control and help you balance your life and work at a more measured pace.

Minimize overload at work. Numerous studies across North America indicate that employees feel chronically overworked. Slipping back into a schedule of overwork is one of the fastest ways to lose the feeling of being relaxed and refreshed.

Nip rising stress levels in the bud. When your stress levels start to rise again after your vacation ends, it can help to view problems as predictable and solvable, and to do something to reduce stress, such as meditating or using progressive muscle relaxation, for a few minutes each day. Men and women who learned mindfulness meditation techniques at a three-day retreat felt refreshed and better able to withstand stress afterward, according to a recent study published in the journal *Biological Psychiatry*.

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When home, be home. Work time and home time get blurred by email, texts, social media, and other screen time, and phone calls for all employees, but especially for employees who work from home. In the evenings and on weekends, and especially if you telecommute, tell yourself, "The office is closed." Set clear boundaries and make your time off more like vacation time again.

Take a vacation from the things that make you feel stressed. If caregiving responsibilities are making you feel stressed, for example, try hard to find someone to relieve you occasionally, or look for respite care in your community. Taking time for yourself will help you be more present for others when your care is needed. You deserve a break. Use it to do something rejuvenating, just as you did when you were on vacation.

Do the things you love to do even when you're not on vacation. Follow some of your vacation rituals throughout the year. Play cards or Scrabble with your kids the way you did when you were on vacation. See more of your friends if that's what felt so great about being away. Go for a swim at your local Y or community center if you miss being in the water. Go on a tour or visit some places of interest near to home.

Spend more time outdoors. Most of us feel more relaxed on vacation partly because we spend more time outdoors in refreshing natural settings. One of the easiest ways to recapture that feeling is to spend some high-quality time outdoors each day. As little as 15 minutes in the woods reduces your levels of the stress hormone cortisol, and most people show improvements in their cognitive performance after 45 minutes, Florence Williams notes in her book *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative*.

Take time to let your mind wander. One of the best benefits of a vacation is the chance to put aside everyday concerns and let your mind daydream and get into a free flow. It not only is relaxing to let your mind wander, but it often leads to creative ideas.

Revisit your vacation through conversation with others and enjoy the memories of vacation activities captured in photographs or videos. Looking at vacation photographs may help you rekindle the relaxing feelings and hold onto the experiences you had.

Declare a vacation day once a week or once a month. It might be on one of your days off. Instead of using this day off for appointments or to do grocery shopping or housecleaning or yard work, use it to pamper yourself and to be with the people you care about.

Visualize and plan your next vacation and look forward to future enjoyment. That's probably one of the best ways to continue feeling relaxed, refreshed and optimistic!

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