

## SURVIVING SUMMER STRESS SYNDROME

All year we look forward to leaving work behind and enjoy the sweetness of doing nothing. And sweet it is for about two or three days. But after the novelty wears off, many of us start getting restless, obsessing over personal problems of feeling guilty for not doing something productive.

Why? Because we don't know how to relax. Studies reveal that people are not having as much fun when they leave the office as everybody thinks, says Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of "Finding Flow" (Basic Books, 1997) and professor of psychology and management at Claremont Graduate University, California. People, he found, were more satisfied when focusing on work than during their "free time." When people were at work, he says, they reported being "creative and alert and experience satisfaction because they were confronted with challenges and had to use their skills."

Once they left work, however, their motivation plummeted. They reported feeling passive and dull while engaged in activities many might think are relaxing, like watching TV or eating out. Most people, he said, would find vacations more stimulating, meaningful and relaxing if they invested energy in pursuing hobbies that kept their interest aroused, their mind focused and their brains from frying. Relaxation, he said, is a state of mind that can be achieved anywhere.

- ***Doing nothing is Not Relaxing***

Csikszentmihalyi says that people feel the best when they are engaged in an activity or thought. Learn to play tennis, read books you think are important or get closer to your children. Do something that requires a skill and involvement different from what you do in other settings.

- ***Think About What You Want to Do and Do It!***

Choose an activity that strikes your interest. Find an experience that's challenging, empowering and relaxing.

- ***Avoid Stress by Planning Activities Ahead of Time.***

Saying, "Oh, we'll think of something to do when we get there," hardly ever works. Before going on a trip check the tourism section of that state's Web site to see a listing of activities. Choose a few.

- ***When in Rome, Do as the Romans.***

Don't limit yourself to boardwalks, shopping outlets and other tourist spots. You can stimulate your senses and spark your curiosity by spending time with the natives.

- ***Mini-Vacations Can Offer the Same Stimulation.***

Many people prefer shorter vacations. Weekend trips are becoming much more popular these days.

- ***Local Day-trips Can Regenerate Your Spirits, Too.***

If you are stuck at home, check out local activities, spend a day at a state park, go to museums-- pretend you are a tourist in your own hometown!

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