

Having Fun

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Summertime is fun time. We savor our vacation and wait all year for the opportunity to put work aside, relax and let go.

Ideally, however, our vacation pleasure would not be limited to the few weeks of fun most of us allow ourselves each year. Instead we would experience relaxation and enjoyment year-round - giving ourselves time for friends, a hobby, listening to music, getting a massage or just hanging out.

This is probably a difficult task for anyone reading this article, living as we do in a culture of achievement and a city of high energy.

It is important nonetheless to slow down and have fun, for both our physical and mental well-being. Norman Cousins claims to have reversed a life threatening illness through laughter. A recent experiment shows that actors who followed instructions to move their facial muscles into expressions of joy, fear or other emotions produced the effects in their nervous systems that ordinarily go with those emotions—a strong reason to make opportunities to stop frowning and start smiling. Another study shows that listening to music produces more alpha rhythms in the brain and more endorphins in the body, both of which help produce the body's relaxation response.

And the more relaxed we are, the more optimistic we can be—a vital state of mind for anyone who wants to achieve positive change in his life.

People caught up in a busy schedule can find it hard to relax. Some people use work to avoid looking at the painful issues in their life. Others have developed very strong work habits.

In the short run it's not fun to look at painful matters. It is not always easy to change habits and learn how to prioritize tasks and goals, perhaps postponing some and relinquishing others. You may need to handle a sense of untidiness at first. But in the long run you'll be achieving the highest priority of all—a more enjoyable life.

Long ago, Freud said that therapy frees us up from our neurotic worries so that we need only suffer the ordinary problems of human existence. That concept still holds true. However, many therapists nowadays look for the person who not only copes well with day to day problems of living, but also experiences a sense of vitality, pleasure and well-being as he moves throughout the course of his lifetime.

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