

SUMMER WELL-BEING

HOW THE SUMMERTIME CAN REFRESH OUR MENTAL HEALTH

Summer is one of the most anticipated seasons in the year, and there are a quite a few good reasons for it. Whether it is the sun shining brightly or the warmer, inviting temperatures perfect for frolicking on the beach, summertime affords many opportunities for fun and relaxation. The spring and summer months also provide a much-awaited respite from staying cooped up inside on soul-chilling, long, dark days for much of the rest of the year. As a result, this season and the many activities and events associated with it are widely considered to be beneficial to our mental and physical health. It therefore makes sense to take complete advantage of this sunny time of the year and enjoy all the benefits it has to offer. This newsletter will look at some popular summer activities and how they can help boost our mental health.



ENJOYING THE OUTDOORS

Warm weather: Summertime brings warm weather and longer days that are much more conducive to spending more time outside. Research shows that spending more time outside in the warmth, at least up to 30 minutes per day, is really good for us. A 2004 University of Michigan study found that those who engaged in more outdoorsy activities on warm, sunny days enjoyed benefits to mood, memory, and overall cognition. This explains why many people rave about how they feel much happier and more energized during the spring and summer months. One reason may be that it is much easier to get the essential “sunshine” vitamin, Vitamin D, which our body naturally sources from sun exposure and which is known to regulate serotonin levels in the brain thus elevating mood.

Nature: Another reason for why spending more time outside is good for us is that it allows us to encounter nature. A number of studies show how nature has a healing influence on a number of maladies, especially those affecting mood. For example, a 2017 study conducted by University of British Columbia found that looking at things in the natural environment, such as a tree, a lake, or a flower, can help people feel much happier and more connected to the environment and to each other than looking at human-made objects. In other words, something as simple as a short stroll outside can do wonders for our mental well-being over staying inside all evening and watching TV.

Fun in the sun: Due to the balmy, inviting weather, people are also much more willing and motivated to exercise or engage in fun physical activities outside, such as biking, swimming, hiking, playing tennis or soccer etc. Engaging in a physical activity that you enjoy not only gets your heart pumping and boosts mood but it also provides a welcome respite from the day’s worries. Mayo Clinic describes this as the “meditating” quality of exercise, one that enables you to focus on the activity and the movement of your body, thus encouraging awareness of the present moment. The meditating quality of exercise coupled with its stimulating influence on the production of endorphins, the feel-good chemicals, renders it one of the best remedies for stress and chronic anxiety.



ENJOY SUNNY TIMES WITH LOVED ONES

We don't really need an excuse to enjoy time with close friends or family, but there is often a desire to plan more activities with loved ones when the weather outside is favourable.

Whether it is having a barbecue in the backyard, going camping, traveling together to an exotic location or simply going for a walk by the lakeside with a friend, there is a boatload of enjoyable social activities to dip your toes into during the summertime, and research shows that this can be a particularly gratifying way of spending your time. A recent study conducted by University of Leipzig that looked into how people can improve and sustain life satisfaction found that those who focus on social engagement as a strategy for well-being enjoyed more life satisfaction a year later than those who didn't.

TRAVELLING

Planning a trip to a country or a nearby town/city that you have never been to before is exciting, almost as much as going on the trip itself. Not only does taking a vacation and travelling give us a break from the monotony of our daily lives, but it is also the perfect way of getting some much-needed relaxation in. According to an article on CNN, "Why vacations matter for your health", vacations are like a balm for our physical and mental health, and those who don't vacation much tend to be "sicker, less productive, stressed, and more anxious and depressed".



Travelling is also a great way to learn about a new culture/country. In an article published in Psychology Today, Kristen Fuller explains that while travelling, you get exposed to new customs, cultures, and languages and return with a broader sense of how the world works or even a more comprehensive worldview. Whether it is learning to converse in a new language or using survival skills while camping, travelling can teach you to handle a variety of different challenges or adapt to unfamiliar situations in a way that nothing else can. This can be particularly beneficial for improving cognition (as learning helps build new neural pathways) as well as building resilience and creative thinking skills.

Due to their many benefits to our mental and physical health, summertime activities can teach us a variety of healthful habits and behaviours, or even just help us realize how spending more time in nature, planning a vacation every now and then, or just spending more meaningful time with family can be good for us and ultimately also good for those around us. While these activities provide suitable ways for refreshing our mental health during the summer, they are just as beneficial for warming up our sense of well-being anytime during the rest of the year.

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