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**abc10. Five Health Benefits of a Vacation**

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Go away, just for the health of it  
by Mel Borins

You know you need some time off, but you have a million excuses why you shouldn't indulge. But why not focus on the positive aspects of taking a vacation? Research has shown that holidays are just what the doctor ordered.

As a family doctor, I have known many patients who had physical and emotional illnesses that were transformed by holidays. Most of us know intuitively that taking a break is good for us but you may be surprised to know that a number of studies have confirmed the health-enhancing effects of vacations.

**1. Live longer**

Research done on 749 women aged 45-64 in Framingham, Mass. in the U.S. showed both homemakers and employed women who took fewer vacations had a significant increase of heart attacks. Homemakers who had a vacation once every six years or less had almost twice the risk of developing a heart attack as homemakers who took vacations two or more times per year.

**2. Maintain brain cells**

James Sands, from the South Coast Institute for Applied Gerontology, studied 112 women aged 65-92 and found there was a relationship between more stressful life events and a decline in intellectual functioning. However there was a positive relationship between vacations and intellectual functioning.

**3. Increase life satisfaction**

Linda Hoopes and John Lounsbury, researchers in the Department of Psychology at the University of Tennessee, surveyed 128 employees before and after a vacation. They found there was an increase in life satisfaction after a vacation.

**4. Decrease burnout**

External stresses and life events that challenge us at work and at home can make us feel overwhelmed or "burnt out." Symptoms can include feeling tired, discouraged, disinterested, unenthusiastic and even uncaring. Often when we retreat from the stresses we gain a renewed perspective on our life. Researchers in the Department of Psychology at Tel Aviv University, Mina Westman and Dov Eden, found that feelings of burnout in all 76 employees studied, decreased significantly during their vacations.

## **5. Improve family life**

Reported in An experiment in leisure (Science Journal, 1968.), W.J. Kaiser analysed the responses of 390 steel workers to an extended paid vacation lasting 13 weeks. He found that vacations were strongly beneficial to family life. Workers reported more interactions and shared activities with their spouse and children. Twenty-five per cent of the respondents felt their work efficiency had increased and that their jobs were more interesting after their vacations.

There is something therapeutic about going away from the daily routines of life and being exposed to a different environment. Every vacation has unique merits. For some people even an organized one-week package holiday or a weekend away can have lasting benefits. Sometimes the journey is an inward exploration and people change the way they view themselves and their predicaments at home. Go away without delay. You owe it to your health.

Mel Borins is a family physician in private practice and a travel and health writer. He is an assistant professor in the department of family and community medicine at the University of Toronto and on staff at St. Joseph's Health Centre in Toronto, Ont. A fellow of the College of Family Physicians of Canada, Borins is the author of the books "Go Away Just for the Health of It" and "An Apple a Day- a Holistic Health Primer".

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