

Script – Print – Take a vacation for your health

A beach vacation. A site-seeing excursion. A long weekend curled up on the backyard deck reading your favorite author. No matter how you slice it, taking time away from the hustle and bustle of life is good for your health.

Finding time to unwind, relax and recharge your batteries is important at any time of the year, but especially now, as people start heading to their summer break destinations. Victor Mendoza, a behavioral health provider with OSF HealthCare, says vacations keep us grounded as we grind through the hectic times in life.

"There're times that we just need to break the routine, do something different," he says. "Vacations, they do that. They help us break the routine. We need to do something we enjoy, travel to new places and explore areas that we've never been to before."

According to some studies, the positive effects after returning from a successful vacation can last as long as six weeks. There are long-term benefits too, including better sleep, improved mood and greater productivity.

Mendoza says your vacation destination should have meaning, whether it's a favorite locale or an area that is ripe with the activities you enjoy. That might mean a relaxing stay at a fancy resort or a physical vacation that includes hiking, biking or fishing at a popular lake.

"Some people like to stay active. They like to catch up on exercise," he says. "Some other people are just tired of going, going, and they just want to sit down on a beach and do nothing. And that's OK."

While some people skip taking vacation – due to time, finances or maybe health reasons – Mendoza says it's still important to get out of the office from time to time to avoid burn out. "We have this sense of responsibility to always be there," he says. "You know you can still call me and text me if something happens. I think we need to really take into consideration that we do need to take this time away."

If traveling across the country isn't your thing, consider planning a staycation or two. Take some local day trips, visit some cool parks or museums in your area, or just stay home and get some household items checked off your to-do list.

Taking a vacation or even just planning for it can improve your mood. "It doesn't always have to be this extravagant, five-star luxury hotel or taking a plane and flying across the world," Mendoza says. "It can be something small. Just staying home and doing things around where you live."

Mendoza recommends taking at least two vacations a year – summer and winter – with smaller breaks in between. And don't forget to unplug. Set expectations with your boss or co-workers before you hit the road. Leave your laptop at home and respond to work calls or emails only in an emergency. "Because it's like you're trying to be in two places at one time, and you're not going to get the full benefit from time away," he says.

The best advice, Mendoza adds, is to give yourself plenty of time when planning that next trip. While you don't have to schedule every detail at once, develop a solid plan so that you're not scrambling at the last minute, causing added stress or anxiety. After all, vacation is supposed to be a time to enjoy and not feel like another day at work.