

Psychologist explains how summer vacation travel can affect your mental health

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Vacations are supposed to be restful, but as we head into the peak season, a Loyola University Medical Center psychologist cautions that vacation travel also can pose risks to your mental and physical health.

These health risks include:

- Stress caused by sticking to a set schedule or by trying too hard to make the most of a trip; plus there's the stress of returning home to household chores and a backlog at work
- Excessive drinking or overeating; [gastrointestinal problems](#) due to strange foods, a busy schedule or lack of privacy
- Sleep deprivation
- Lack of exercise
- Lack of time to yourself
- Conflict with fellow travelers
- Homesickness

But vacation travel also can be good for your mental health. In addition to being restful and recharging, travel can be intellectually stimulating. It provides an opportunity to spend time with friends and family; to experience new food, music, language, etc.; to engage in deep conversation and intimacy; and to feel more connected to your environment, family and community.

"As humans, we are all drawn to novelty," said Kate Goldhaber, PhD. "No matter how much we like our jobs and lifestyles, we inevitably

become bored and stagnant in our routines from time to time. Travel offers a break in the routine and a chance to recharge.

"Vacations also offer opportunities to strengthen relationships. Without the distractions of work and household responsibilities, people can engage and appreciate each other on a deeper level."

Goldhaber, a licensed clinical psychologist, is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences of Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. Her specialties include anxiety, depression, [personality disorders](#), relationship problems and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Goldhaber said it's important to take care of your body while traveling – it will decrease your vulnerability to fatigue, illness and [negative emotions](#). Stay hydrated, get [adequate sleep](#), exercise when possible and eat balanced meals.

Be flexible. Unexpected hitches may require you to change plans. "Try your best to work with what actually happens, rather than trying to maintain a plan that doesn't fit with reality," Goldhaber said. "Don't beat yourself up if you decide to sleep in and miss out on some sightseeing."

And detach yourself from work. Ask a co-worker to cover for you, if possible. Don't check email or voice mail. "If you spend half your vacation plugged in," Goldhaber said, "it's not a true respite."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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