

# Vacation time recharges US workers, but positive effects vanish within days, new survey finds

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Taking time off helps the majority of U.S. workers recover from stress and experience positive effects that improve their well-being and job

performance, but for nearly two-thirds of working adults, the benefits of time away dissipate within a few days, according to a survey released by the American Psychological Association.

Nearly a quarter of working adults (24 percent) say the positive effects of vacation time—such as more energy and feeling less [stress](#)—disappear immediately upon returning to work, the survey found. Forty percent said the benefits last only a few days.

APA's 2018 Work and Well-Being survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll from Feb. 15 to March 1, 2018, among 1,512 U.S. adults who reported being employed full time, part time or self-employed.

"People need time off from work to recover from stress and prevent burnout," said David W. Ballard, PsyD, MBA, who heads APA's Center for Organizational Excellence. "But employers shouldn't rely on the occasional vacation to offset a stressful work environment. Unless they address the [organizational factors](#) causing stress and promote ongoing stress management efforts, the benefits of time off can be fleeting. When stress levels spike again shortly after employees return to work, that's bad for workers and for business. Employers can do better."

The Work and Well-Being Survey provides a snapshot of the U.S. workforce, including [employee](#) well-being and attitudes and opinions related to workplace policies and practices. Among other things, this year's survey explored the effect of time off—paid and unpaid—on employee well-being and work.

The majority of working Americans reported positive effects of taking vacation time and said when they return to work their mood is more positive (68 percent) and they have more energy (66 percent) and motivation (57 percent) and feel less stressed (57 percent). Additionally, working adults reported that, following time off, they were more

productive (58 percent) and their work quality was better (55 percent).

Despite this, about one in five (21 percent) said they feel tense or stressed out while on vacation, more than a quarter (28 percent) said they wind up working more than they planned to and 42 percent reported that they dread returning to work.

"Websites and magazine articles offer plenty of tips on how to make the most of time out of the office, but often put the onus on the individual employee and ignore important organizational factors. A supportive culture and supervisor, the availability of adequate paid time off, effective work-life policies and practices, and psychological issues like trust and fairness all play a major role in how employees achieve maximum recharge," Ballard said. "Much of that message comes from the top, but a culture that supports time off is woven throughout all aspects of the workplace."

Only 41 percent of U.S. workers reported that their organization's culture encourages employees to take time off, and just 38 percent said their supervisor encourages the same. And in workplaces that do support time off, it's more than the employees who benefit.

When an organization's culture encourages time off, employees are more likely to benefit from vacation time and those benefits last longer. Upon returning from vacation, employees who said their organization's culture encourages time off were more likely to report having more motivation (71 percent) compared to employees who said their organization doesn't encourage time off (45 percent). They were also more likely to say they are more productive (73 percent vs. 47 percent) and that their work quality is better (70 percent vs. 46 percent). Overall, they were more likely to say they feel valued by their employer (80 percent vs. 37 percent), that they are satisfied with their job (88 percent vs. 50 percent) and that the organization treats them fairly (88 percent vs. 47 percent).

They were similarly more likely to say they would recommend their organization as a good place to work (81 percent vs 39 percent).

In organizations where time off is encouraged, 64 percent of employees said their employer provides sufficient resources to help them manage their stress. Only 18 percent of employees said the same in workplaces where time off is not encouraged. Overall, more than a third of working Americans (35 percent) reported experiencing chronic work stress saying during their workday they typically feel tense or stressed out, and just 41 percent said their employer provides sufficient resources to help employees manage their stress.

Nearly half of U.S. workers (49 percent) said low salaries are a significant source of work stress. Other reported sources of stress: lack of opportunity for growth or advancement (46 percent), too heavy of a workload (42 percent) and unrealistic job expectations and long hours (39 percent each).

The survey also looked at the effect of employees having access to adequate mental health resources. Overall, just half of workers (50 percent) say their employer provides the resources necessary to help them meet their mental health needs. When adequate resources are provided, only 33 percent of workers said they typically feel tense or stressed out during the workday, compared to 59 percent of those who said their employer doesn't provide sufficient mental health resources. When it comes to overall well-being, nearly three-fourths of employees supported with mental health resources (73 percent) say their employer helps them develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle, compared to 14 percent who say they don't have the resources.

"Chronic [work](#) stress, insufficient [mental health resources](#), feeling overworked and under supported—these are issues facing too many workers, but it doesn't have to be this way," Ballard said.

"Psychological research points the way in how employers can adopt effective workplace practices that go a long way in helping their employees thrive and their business grow."

Provided by American Psychological Association

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