

# WELLNESS MILESTONES



Council for  
Public Interest  
in Anesthesia

## Time Out

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**T**ime is absolute. Time is not bankable. We cannot save time; it can only be spent. And there are only two ways we can spend it: wisely, or, not so wisely.

There are 24 hours in a day, 168 hours per week, 7 days each week that are available to us. Take out 50 hours (or less) for sleep, and we have about 118 hours to accomplish everything we think we need to do.

Every four years, something unique occurs. An extra day is added to the year in order to bring the average length of the year into line with the Earth's orbit around the sun. People around the world are treated to one extra day—Feb. 29—to spend as they please.

Leap day is a blank slate, 24 hours that is waiting to be wasted or transformed into a spontaneous, unplanned happening. For some, it's an opportunity to celebrate that birthday that only comes every four years. Legend has it as the only day a female can propose to a man. This year, the 29th falls on a Friday. For most people it will be a work day, so it simply means business as usual. Or maybe, it can be the three-day weekend you promised yourself you would take when you had time.

### Take Your Time

Do you remember when you had a day just for you? When was the last time you took time to just enjoy being alive? When was the last time you did something for the simple pleasure of doing it?

Americans threw away an estimated 415 million vacation days in 2005. That's more than a million years of unused vacation! Why would we be so crazy? We know chronic stress and over-commitment to work have been linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, and mortality. We know we are not doing anyone any favors by not taking time off—not the family, not the employer, and definitely not ourselves.

Whatever your excuse for not taking a break—your job can't live without you, you can't afford the expense, or there simply aren't enough days in the year—toss them out the window.

Research suggests that people who take frequent vacations are less

likely to be depressed, tense, or tired. They have a reduced risk of heart disease and all-cause mortality. Those who tend to spend more time with their spouse, children, or with friends are more satisfied with their relationships. Individuals report being more interested and more productive in their work when they return from time off, and statistics show that not taking a vacation will make your *RealAge* older—much older!

In the 1960s, it was predicted that by the year 2000 Americans would be using mobile phones, working 20-hour weeks, and enjoying more than three months of vacation each year. Only one of these predictions has come true, and unfortunately it (mobile phone use) significantly reduces our ability to leave the work and worries behind.

Technological developments such as your cell phone, BlackBerry, and laptop, have blurred the boundary between your work life and personal life. Most adults spend more of their waking hours at work than anywhere else. More to the point, they take the work home with them!

When it comes to work-life balance we need to set limits to protect ourselves. Taking time for yourself is a way to acknowledge the need to restore balance in your life.

### Wellness and Making Good Choices

In our fast-paced society it's difficult to establish a routine that has an impact on our personal wellness, particularly in finding the motivation and time. The challenge for each of us is to create the building blocks that work for us in creating a balanced lifestyle.

Consider taking time outs in your day-to-day work. Time-outs are built into every sport, from halftime in football to changing sides in tennis. They are a way to change the momentum. Yet, we often let the momentum of stressful situations run away with us. We get entrenched in the game instead of doing what really needs to be done. Then, as with any decisions made under stress, we start to make the wrong decisions, work on the wrong tasks, get angry at the wrong people. We are no longer in control of our time or energy—the stress is.

Wellness is not static; is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a more balanced existence. For many, wellness



*Each day provides its own gifts.*

*Marcus Aurelius*

represents the integration of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual fitness.

All of the components of wellness are interconnected. At their core they have the same common denominator, you—your choices, your behaviors, and your motivation to change. Long-term wellness isn't just the absence of unhealthy feelings, burnout, or impairment; it is the active involvement in things that rejuvenate your inner strength.

Motivation is dynamic and changing. It depends on the day, even sometimes the hour. There are many things that can increase your motivation, particularly the level of importance you place on making the change. Knowing why you value change and what will help you achieve your goals. Those goals also change along with the needs and interests.

### Go with the "Flow"

You develop an awareness or a state of "flow" as you move toward total wellness and fitness. According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's research, a person experiences "flow" when fully immersed in what he or she is doing, characterized by a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity. These activities provide immediate feedback, and the sense of being-in-the-flow, or balanced, is the result. If we're lucky in our career choice, these moments may occur at work. But, if we are working in a less-than-optimal job, it is critical to find balance by adding in leisure time.

Studies show the absence of leisure contributes to negative physical symptoms and is indirectly related to decreased productivity. It is also important to recognize that the positive flow or synergy one experiences at work can contribute to workaholic attitudes, over-commitment, and increased fatigue and stress.

Research concludes that moderate-intensity physical activity is associated with a reduced risk of heart disease and supports current exercise recommendations. However, if the balance is not there in the other areas of our lives, and we are not taking care of our emotional selves—our bodies will show the signs sooner or later. Fitness enthusiasts should understand that working out and eating right is only one part of what makes us healthy.

So, change your mindset. Stop thinking of time off as a

luxury you can live without and start thinking of it as a healthy habit. Your internal strength is like a rechargeable battery; even when it is almost drained of resources, a quick infusion of positive thoughts and actions can bring it back to ignition. Time off is probably the easiest lifestyle change you'll ever make.

Leap year is made up of a little bit of four different years. We can take little bits of the past, store them up and make a new day in the present. Chose to use the extra time wisely.■

### Resources

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