

HURRY UP & RELAX!

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Women who take vacations frequently are less likely to become tense, depressed or tired and are more satisfied with their marriages, according to a recent study conducted by researchers at Marshfield Clinic, Marshfield, Wis.

The study, published in a recent issue of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal*, found that the odds of depression and tension were higher among women who took vacations only once in two years compared with women who took vacations twice or more per year. In addition, the odds of marital satisfaction decreased as the frequency of vacations decreased.

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"Vacations provide a break from everyday stressors," said Cathy McCarty, Ph.D., the study's principal investigator. **"They allow us time away from work or home and help us release built-up tension."**

The majority of Americans receive only two weeks of paid vacation per year, compared with more than one month of paid time off in many other countries, says McCarty.

"This study proves vacations are good for your mental health and may help you do a better job at work," McCarty said. "Employers should be supportive of time off because they benefit from having relaxed, happy employees."

The study, funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), is an analysis of the research conducted between 1996 and 2001 that involved 1,500 women recruited from the Marshfield Epidemiological Study Area, a geographic area in central Wisconsin. Researchers compared psychological stress, quality of marital life and disruptive home life due to work among women who take vacations frequently and those who do not.

Questionnaires seeking information about personal health history, symptoms of tension and depression, quality of marital life, social support, job control and socioeconomic status were mailed to participants. The self-reported health events were then verified through electronic medical records

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available at Marshfield Clinic. Results found the majority of those surveyed took a vacation once a year (34 percent), followed by twice a year (23.4 percent), once every two to five years (23.2 percent) and once every six years or less (19.4 percent).

"It's shocking to me that nearly one in five women we studied reported taking a vacation only once in six years," McCarty said.

The odds of tension increased among women who took vacations once a year, once in two to five years or once in every six years compared to women who took vacations twice or more per year.

Similar results were found for depression. The odds of being depressed increased as the frequency of vacation decreased. In addition, women who took vacations only once in six years thought their home life was more disruptive due to work, felt more tired and exhausted and had less than eight hours of sleep.

The Marshfield Clinic system consists of 41 patient care, research and education facilities in northern, central and western

Wisconsin, making it one of the largest comprehensive medical systems in the United States.

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The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is the federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related injury and illness. NIOSH is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the Department of Health and Human Services. ✧

