

[IMAGE]

5 Steps to a Stress-Free Summer

By Editorial Staff

Summer's finally here, bringing warm weather, long days and plenty of time to enjoy it. After all, with kids out of school and your vacation time likely reaching its max, you've got the perfect opportunity to chill out, de-stress and relax. But is that what's going to happen? Too many people turn summer into just another stressful experience, when it should be just the opposite. After all, your exercise, nutrition and overall health goals are easier than ever to meet during the summer months. Here are five steps you can take to make this summer the stress-free variety:

1. *Move Your Gym Outdoors*: OK, so let's start with your fitness plan, which has been going well enough that you're comfortable in your summer swimsuit. But wait: Now you're stressed because the weather's nice and you don't want to spend every day in the gym to maintain that beach body you've worked so hard to attain. Good news: Summer's the perfect time to take your workout outdoors and stay in great shape – and have fun doing it! Whether it's a day at the beach chasing down Frisbees, a bike ride through the park or your favorite athletic activity (tennis, anyone?), sunny days and warmer temperatures give you ample opportunity to exercise outside of your normal gym routine.

summer - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark 2. *Healthy Summer Harvest*: Good nutrition is even easier during the summer, with various fruits and vegetables in season and ready to be combined in your favorite antioxidant-bursting summer salads, entrees and desserts. And with the weather in your favor, get out of that stuffy kitchen and have a few picnic celebrations to elevate your mood, spend time with family and friends, and remind yourself that stress may be back for three seasons of the year, but this summer, you're kicking it to the curb.

3. *Take a Technology Break*: We'll say it once and once only: This summer, do everything you can to pull yourself, your kids and everyone you know away from those screens - small, large and in between - and de-stress by getting away from technology and enjoying the wonder of the outdoors. Don't you spend enough time glued to your computer, smartphone, television and various other technological "advances"? They're certainly not advances when it comes to your health. Just think about it: How often does your cellphone irritate or frustrate you, versus relax and soothe you? You know the answer. So leave your devices

at home whenever possible this summer and reap the benefits.

4. *The Power of White Noise*: Quality sleep is an increasingly fleeting luxury these days as our lives become ever-more frantic and stressful (see step 3 for a possible contributor to the problem). With warm, lazy nights at your disposal this summer, improve your chances of getting a good night's sleep by relying on Mother Nature for some white noise. If it's safe to do so where you live, leave a bedroom window open and let the crickets put you to sleep - and keep you there. If windows need to be closed, why not try a sunset walk around the neighborhood to de-clutter your mind, process your day and prepare you for restful, refreshing sleep? Your body and mind will thank you for it.

5. *Better Safe Than Sorry*: While you're spending all this quality time outdoors, remember to protect yourself from nature's harshest element: the sun. Nothing raises the stress bar more during the summer than a painful, dangerous sunburn; especially one you could have prevented simply by applying sunscreen to exposed areas, wearing a hat, and avoiding direct sunlight during the middle of the day (approximately 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.). In this case, you'll be reducing your personal stress by feeling confident you're protecting yourself, *and* reducing the stress on your body that results from sun-induced damage, which can lead to skin cancer.

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