[IMAGE]

Take it on the Road

By Meghan Vivo

Travel season is around the corner, bringing ample opportunity to eat out, sleep in and completely disregard your daily diet and fitness regimens. This summer, don't leave good health at home - *take it on the road.*

It's the night before your big adventure. Your hard work has paid off, and you're ready to refresh and renew with a relaxing summer vacation. You expect to see the sights, lounge by the pool, and let's not forget - sample the local cuisine!

A man and woman cruising along a scenic road in their convertible. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark You are certainly entitled to do these things, but too much overindulgence can ruin all your pre-vacation efforts toward better health. On your next vacation, bring along this travelogue of tips for making healthy decisions that won't ruin the fun.

The* Voyage *Begins

Day 1 Graphic - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Transitioning into vacation mode requires the right mindset.** According to one study, middle-aged men who skipped vacation for five consecutive years increased their risk of a heart attack by 30 percent. Vacation is a healthy and often necessary part of life, so commit to making the most of your time off.

Day one of vacation is usually spent traveling to your destination. If you are flying, there are a number of precautions you should take to minimize poor health choices:

- A luggage tag. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Refrain from eating large meals prior to and during your flight. You won't be moving much, and your body will have difficulty processing all that food.
- Reduce your sodium intake. This will help prevent you from retaining water and becoming dehydrated.
- Remember to get up and move around periodically to stretch and get your blood circulating.
- Avoid drinking alcohol prior to and during your flight; load up on water instead. Aircraft cabin relative humidity is usually below 20 percent, which makes for a very dry environment.

If you are taking a road trip, many of the same principles apply. Pack a variety of healthy snacks, drink plenty of water and take a rest stop every couple of hours to stretch. If you are fortunate enough to be traveling internationally, be sure you are up-to-date with immunizations, passports and visas. Check the Web site of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) for health alerts and travel warnings.

A pile of poloroid pictures and a passport. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark When you arrive at your destination, try to adjust to local time as quickly as possible to minimize the effects of jet lag. This means going to bed and waking up at appropriate times for the new time zone. Give yourself one day to adjust, and be sure to schedule outdoor, physical activities during your first day of vacation.

***Take in the* Sights**

Day 2 and 3 Graphic - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Most summer vacation spots offer all types of aerobic activities, such as bike riding, tennis, golf and hiking.** Even if your vacation goal is to simply lounge on the beach, you can always take a quick walk or jog, play beach volleyball, or swim, snorkel or surf. Being active will not only help you feel better, but also will help you get to know your vacation spot. There is no better way to meet the locals and take in your surroundings than walking around town.

Polaroid of a man hiking. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark If building physical activity into your day proves difficult, you can spend 10-20 minutes each morning doing a mini-workout in your hotel room. Bring sneakers and resistance bands or a jump rope for resistance training and aerobic exercise. Without any equipment at all, you can jog or do pushups, crunches, lunges, dips using a chair, or squats, as well as jumping jacks. Of course, if your hotel has a gym and you're motivated enough to use it, you can reach your daily exercise quota in one 30- to 40-minute session.

A pair of binoculars. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark If you were in good shape when you left for vacation, you don't want to lose the results of all that hard work. By some accounts, you can lose 20 percent of your aerobic power in just one week, 15 percent in two weeks and up to 25 percent in three weeks. Two months of inactivity can cost you all your gains. The only good news is that muscles retain a memory of prior exercise, so muscle strength fades slower than aerobic capacity.

Day 4 and 5 Graphic - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark ***Taste the*** **Flavors**

Nothing says vacation like good food. Just remember: Everything in moderation. Sample exotic foods, order dessert on occasion - just avoid full-blown feasts and overindulgences. You can limit the splurges by restricting yourself to one treat per day; make it worthwhile by choosing a treat you can't easily find at home.

Polaroid of a fancy dinner. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark In a study from the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association,* researchers revealed a direct link between how often women eat meals out and the amount of calories, fat and sodium contained in their diets. If you can avoid eating out by buying your own healthy snacks - fruits, vegetables, yogurts, granola - try to limit yourself to one meal out per day on vacation. Not only are restaurant meals generally less healthy, but the portion sizes are double what the average person should consume in one sitting.

According to the American Institute for Cancer Research, 67 percent of Americans finish their entrées always or most of the time. Instead, consider saving leftovers for the next day, requesting a half-sized portion, sharing an entrée, or choosing an appetizer as your meal. Don't be shy about asking for your meal prepared a healthier way - vegetables instead of a potato or pasta; broiled or baked instead of fried; and no creamy sauces, mayonnaise or butter.

If your hotel offers all-you-can-eat buffets or continental breakfast, don't binge on pancakes, waffles, hash browns and pastries just because they're free. Choose fresh fruit, whole-grain cereal and some form of protein to get your day started right. If your hotel room has a kitchenette, consider preparing your own breakfast and lunch. And whatever you do, stay away from the hotel minibar!

Polaroids of a woman eating dinner and of the dinner itself. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Especially in the summer months, drink a glass of water per hour when you are active. Dehydration is a common source of sickness and exhaustion when traveling, so stock your hotel room with bottled or filtered water. People also are less likely to consume enough fiber to keep their systems functioning properly on vacation - all the more reason to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.

Day 6 Graphic - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark ***Back to*** **Reality**

This may be a rough day. Your impending return home means getting back to housework, cooking meals, school schedules, and worst of all, work! According to one study, 43 percent of Americans return home feeling overwhelmed by the work they have to do. Yellow stickie with thumb tack. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark

In order to get back into a healthy routine as quickly as possible, try to allow one day at home before returning to work for running errands, resting and stocking up on healthy meal options. Plan to exercise within one to two days of your return home. It may motivate you to meet a friend at the gym and catch up on your vacation stories.

Jet lag can make your return home even more difficult. If you've crossed multiple time zones, your internal body clock (known as the *suprachiasmatic nucleus*, located in the hypothalamus) will likely be out of sync with your daily schedule. Symptoms of jet lag, including fatigue, irritability and difficulty sleeping, are generally worse when traveling east, but should only last two to three days at most.

A stack of bindered studies. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark You can minimize the effects of jet lag by getting a good night's sleep just before and after traveling. Eat only light meals, drink water, wear loose clothing, and boost your circulation by doing ankle twists, knee lifts, and neck and shoulder rolls in your seat.

Letting go of your worries is part of the allure of vacation. But letting go of your health should not be an option. By building healthy meals and physical activity into each day of your vacation, you will make the most of your travel time and your continuing efforts to stay healthy. This summer, don't leave your health at home - take it on the road.

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